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LETTERS

responsibility in science

Brewster, N.Y.

DEAR SIRS: I am glad to see in your Mar. 4 letters column a reference by Dr. Esther Milner to the Society for Social Responsibility in Science, whose members strive, in accordance with their individual consciences, to exercise their profession for the benefit of humanity. It is deplorable that the SSRS, with its splendid objectives and the self-sacrificing efforts of many of its members, does not have a larger constituency. Now more than twenty years old, it has members in twenty-five countries and its *Newsletter* circulates in forty, but the membership has remained stable at approximately 500 for the past five years.

Dues are adjusted according to income, but at most amount to the cost of a few drinks at a metropolitan cocktail lounge. The $2 subscription for the *Newsletter* is included in the dues. The president for 1967-68 is Prof. E. U. Condon of Boulder, Colo., and the chairman of the membership committee is Daniel Berger, 6655 Lawnton Ave., Philadelphia, Pa. 19126.

Nation readers in the New York metropolitan area can hear Dr. Milner herself on the evening of Thursday, April 4, at the Community Church, 40 East 35 Street, New York 10016. Admission is free and the public is cordially invited. The subject of Dr. Milner's talk will be announced shortly.

Carl Dreher

napalm

Ottawa, Ont.

DEAR SIRS: Following the statement by Joe Alex Morris, Jr. ["The Strategy of Daydreams" *The Nation*, Jan. 22] that napalm had been used in November last by Israeli forces against either Jordanian army positions or a refugee camp—the article did not say which—I wrote to the Israeli ambassador in Ottawa asking if this was a correct statement. The ambassador's reply is enclosed. [Ambassador Arieh Eshel declined to answer Dr. Rosenberg's question, but went on to point out that napalm has not been banned by any international convention.]

All weapons of war inflict suffering; but napalm is surely one of the most barbarous, and its continued use is inexcusable. Particularly unforgivable is the use of napalm against guerrillas such as in Vietnam, where the unfortunate civilians caught between two belligerents are likely to constitute by far the largest proportion of the victims. . . .Poison gas was outlawed by international convention; and surely the same could be done with napalm. Could not *The Nation* . . . initiate a campaign to take the issue of napalm to the International Court—or to the greater court of public opinion—and have this torture banned by international law?

Horace D. Rosenberg, M.D.

money pays the bills

Tougaloo, Miss.

DEAR SIRS: There is not a *Mississippi Newsletter* this week. There was simply no money. We at Freedom Information Service are writers (and filers, and sorters and pasters). We are not salesmen. If you are not our salesmen, there are none. We've gotten an abundance of promises and sympathy. Only money pays the bills.

Miracles we don't ask. Only that you contact those you know. Add up small donations or talk a fat cat into remembering there's still (some semblance of) a civil rights movement in Mississippi. We can only wait to hear from you.

Freedom Information Service
Box 120, Tougaloo, Miss. 39174

EDITORIALS

LBJ's Moment of Crisis

After the big shake-up of the last two weeks, the political situation should now begin to shake out. In the meantime, a few words of caution. Because of what we had to say (issue of March 18) about the unreliability of polls in this election, it is worth noting that all of them were wrong about New Hampshire. So read and study the polls, by all means, but be wary. For much the same reason be skeptical about those big fat dogmas to which the press is addicted in election years. For example, we have been reminded again and again that "not since Chester Arthur was rejected by his party in 1884 has an incumbent President been denied renomination." Now the fact that it had happened at least once should suggest to the pundits that it might happen again. In fact, it has happened more than once: Tyler (1844), Fillmore (1852), Pierce (1856). But more important than precedent is the fact that this is an exceptional election. "You have to remember," a Democratic politician told a reporter for the *National Observer*, "that we've never had a situation like this before. I mean we've never had so much emotion." Emotion is volatile and hard to measure. Even a brief survey of the post-New Hampshire scene suggests why the dogma that a President can always have the renomination if he wants it is open to question.

In New Hampshire, the President's vulnerability, in his own party, was demonstrated. But Wisconsin is much more important. It has far more voters and shares certain voter characteristics with some eight states in the area. Wisconsin is good political terrain for McCarthy; he has more going for him there than he will have in the other primaries he has entered. The timing is excellent—not too long after New Hampshire and not too soon. The McCarthy partisans are "up" and they will stay that way. McCarthy, in brief, can win in Wisconsin. If he does, the President's assurance of renomination, though not utterly doomed, will be badly shaken. The crisis for both McCarthy and Kennedy will come later, in Oregon (where George Wallace's name will appear on the Democratic ballot), and in California (where the Peace and Freedom and Wallace parties will have some impact). But for Johnson, the moment of crisis is right now in Wisconsin, and this for several reasons.

Sensing the importance of the state, the politicians and party chieftains will begin to desert Johnson if he loses. To them, politics is much too serious a business to be left to chance or voter caprice; they can't afford to be sentimental and, as between Johnson and Kennedy, they can hardly afford to be neutral. If Johnson loses, they will say to themselves: What might Kennedy have done in Wisconsin with his money and organization? And what might he do elsewhere? Kennedy they can understand; he is "big-time politics." He is one of them. He understands organization and believes in money and muscle. They do not "dig" McCarthy in the same way. He has proved himself to be a fine campaigner and a brilliant tactician and more likely to unify the Democratic Party than either Johnson or Ken-

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nedy, but considerations of this order are not uppermost in the minds of politicos. If Johnson loses in Wisconsin, the loser tag, which had been reserved for Nixon, will be applied to him. And this is *not* an election in which an incumbent President can rely upon the loyal support of well-organized state machines. With a few exceptions, the Democratic state organizations are in bad shape. Johnson has been an almost total disaster as party leader. When Sandy Levin, the new party chairman in Michigan visited Washington recently, neither the President nor Marvin Watson nor James Rowe, the President's campaign manager, had time to see him; it is reported that Levin left the Capital "less than enthralled" by the Administration.

But the bosses and politicians are not the only ones who will begin to desert Johnson if he loses in Wisconsin. Kennedy's candidacy provides excellent political cover should Walter Reuther now decide to break with the AFL-CIO. If Bobby can risk a rupture with Johnson, Reuther can risk one with Meany, who is backing Johnson. Reuther and Kennedy are in much the same position: it is now or never for both of them. If Reuther wants to get back into the mainstream of labor leadership, he must act soon. Labor policy today must be shaped with full realization, as he himself has said, that "the world is in deep trouble." Three cents more an hour is important, but so are inflation, the "austerity" programs to check it, and Vietnam. Even before Kennedy's announcement the UAW, always a big contributor, had decided not to join the AFL-CIO's political drive this year; campaign funds will be distributed to candidates approved by the union. Nor will its experienced organizers be available to the AFL-CIO.

In Oregon, the AFL-CIO state committee, to its shame, is not supporting Sen. Wayne Morse, but he does have the endorsement of the UAW. It is still not too late for Reuther to break with the Administration, despite his fairly recent mild plug for Johnson ("the best thing we see on the political horizon at this time"). If he were to join the rapidly expanding army of "dropouts," his action might well trigger a rank-and-file insurrection in labor nationally.

Dr. George Gallup reports: "The solid support given President Johnson and his Vietnam policies, demonstrated by the heads of organized labor . . . is not in line with the view of rank-and-file union members." Forty-three per cent of union families disapprove of what the President is doing in Vietnam. Other leaders of mass organizations now face the same hard choice that confronts Reuther. Both the President and the Vice President jetted to Minneapolis to woo the National Farmers Union, but late reports indicate that the membership of the organization is sharply divided on Vietnam. "I have an open mind," said the president of the Illinois Farmers Union, "but we're going to talk to Bobby Kennedy to see how he stands."

It is being said, of course, that the President will certainly not stand aside now, so great is his hatred of Bobby Kennedy. But the "total situation" at Chicago might dictate the wisdom of that decision. The chance may be improbable; it is not unthinkable. And the President is not likely to seek re-election if he feels certain that he would be defeated in November. He is a proud and vain man but

IN THIS ISSUE

April 1, 1968

EDITORIALS

426

ARTICLES

430 Vietnam & the Gold Drain — *Peter L. Bernstein*

431 Three Prisoners: The Petty Route Home — *Howard Zinn*

437 This Spring in Prague — *Jiri Mucha*

439 The Counter Culture: Part II Politics of the Nervous System — *Theodore Roszak*

444 Democratic Shake-Up: The California Survival Kit — *Phil Kerby*

BOOKS & THE ARTS

446 Wolfe Among the Monstres Sacrés — *Mina Curtiss*

448 Versions of Rural America — *Richard Clark Sterne*

450 Snow Lodge (poem) — *Leonard Nathan*

451 Man With a Marvy Lymph System — *Robert Hatch*

452 A Fearful & Mindless Violence — *David Thorburn*

453 Thumb-Sucking — *Richard Eberhart*

454 Theatre — *Harold Clurman*

455 Crossword Puzzle — *Frank W. Lewis*

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The Nation is published weekly (except biweekly in July and August) by the Nation Magazine Company and copyright 1968 in the U.S.A. by the Nation Associates, Inc., 333 Sixth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10014, Tel: CH 2-8400. West Coast office (for editorial correspondence only): 1256 Westwood Boulevard, Los Angeles, Calif. 90024. Second class postage paid at New York, N.Y. and at additional mailing office.

Subscription Price: One year, $10; two years, $18. Add $1 for Canadian postage; $2 for foreign postage.

Change of Address: It is essential that subscribers ordering a change of address give five weeks' notice and provide their old as well as their new address. Please give Zip Code numbers for both addresses.

Information to Libraries: The Nation is indexed in *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature*, Book Review Digest, Book Review Index and the Public Affairs Information Service.

THE NATION *Vol. 206 No. 14*

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he is not the kind who would go down to defeat just to spite the Kennedys.

Will this be then, as most of the pundits are also saying, "the night of the long knives," in which bitter rivalries will hopelessly fragment the Democratic Party? Not if the case against Johnson is made on the issues, as Senator McCarthy has suggested. Since Johnson is, in a real sense, the issue, he can expect rough treatment, the more so since Kennedy is now in the race. But there is no occasion for a Kennedy-McCarthy feud. Senator McCarthy has said that he will support Kennedy if he is nominated; Kennedy must give his support if McCarthy wins. In the District of Columbia, a joint slate has apparently been agreed upon; similar arrangements may be worked out elsewhere. If the fight is kept to the issues, and develops as one between those supporting Johnson and those opposing him, then his renomination is by no means assured and the Democratic Party may emerge the stronger for the challenge. We do not remember just what troubles the unfortunate Chester Arthur faced in 1884, but they could not be as serious as those Lyndon Johnson faces in 1968.

Blockbuster

Governor Rockefeller's decision not to seek the Republican nomination is the most dramatic—and surprising—development to date of this wild campaign. That it was a sudden decision, however long it may have been pondered, is incontestable; some of the Governor's staunchest supporters were caught completely by surprise, including Senator Morton who had agreed to manage his campaign. Was it, asks Tom Wicker in *The New York Times*, "surrender or strategy"? Or was it for compelling, undisclosed personal considerations? The best guess is that it was a combination of all three. About personal reasons it is futile at present to speculate, but it was "surrender," in the sense that the Governor has measurably enhanced Nixon's chances; "strategy" in the sense that some combination of circumstances might, with the polls pitted against the primaries, create an overwhelming demand for Rockefeller as the strongest candidate the GOP could name.

In a way, the New Yorker has made it difficult for Nixon to overcome the "loser" tag, unless Nixon-Reagan fights develop, and has created a vacuum within the party insofar as the liberal-moderate element is concerned. But, on the record to date, it is difficult to place much confidence in that element; they do not act when they should act and when they finally act they do the wrong thing. There were reasons for the Governor to be discouraged. The group of Republican leaders that assembled in his New York apartment to urge him to run was not at all representative, and the inclusion of William Miller, the forgotten Vice Presidential nominee of 1964, merely made the absentees more conspicuous. The more recent meeting in Washington was not much more impressive. Slight wonder that Rockefeller was reported to be "grumpy and pale" when he left this session.

What it comes down to is implicit in the remarkable statement Senator Morton issued a week earlier. "The United States and the Republican Party teeter at the brink of a disaster that is probably without parallel . . . . Suicide is a term not unfamiliar to those who have seen the Republican Party dutifully march over the cliff like a troop of lemmings. At this very moment, my party is once again poised at the edge of the precipice and perhaps, like the Whips a century ago, for the last time." The GOP is a third party today, in numerical terms, and there is little reason, despite the number of Republican governors and fairly good Republican prospects in the Congressional elections, to believe that Nixon can bring in the dissident Democrats and the independents whom the party must attract in order to win. This is a year when "the not-to-be-conceived" has been happening and will probably continue to happen, but it would be something of a miracle if the Republicans, responding to the shock of this blockbuster, were now to rally to the Governor or to one of the bright young talents in the party.

Maximum Security

"Your President," as Mr. Johnson likes humbly to refer to himself, has reached that point of disheveled morale where nothing he does turns out happily. Early in March, he set off with his wife, his daughter, his son-in-law, his grandchild and his dog for a weekend of sunny relaxation at Ramey Air Base in Puerto Rico. Inasmuch as security is now approaching monomania with Mr. Johnson, he told no one where he was going and warned no one—at least no Puerto Rican—that he was coming.

He golfed, churched and shook GI hands, but he did not shake the hand of anyone representing the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. Since LBJ is a prodigious handshaker, the oversight was felt. And Latin feathers were not smoothed by the report that the Caribbean spot which the President had really preferred was St. John in the Virgin Islands. St. John, it was explained, was insufficiently "secure," though in fact it is today virtually a Rockefeller satrapy. No barbed wire, though, and no lookout towers. When Lyndon plays, he likes to be locked in.

The Event of the Year

Time inaugurated the custom of featuring on its cover at year's end the "man of the year." It was not a bad idea but it suffered from two inherent defects: in some years the outstanding man was so obvious that the cover was anticlimactic; while in other years, *Time* chose someone who looked better to the editors than to anybody else, except possibly the subject's wife. But since the greatness of men is tied up with the events they influence, will one of the media accept our suggestion that they feature the "event of the year"? It may be happening right now.

Vietnam, the run on gold, the remarkable Bobby-Gene-Lyndon political configuration, have obscured the importance of the extraordinary events in Czechoslovakia. It is not only what is now happening that may stand out come Christmas, but the way in which it is happening. The Czech intellectuals are rebelling, and they are doing so in a way that should delight Prof. J. P. Nettl, who suggested in an unpleasantly convincing article (*The Nation*, March 4) that intellectuals might be obsolete. But those were

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Western intellectuals. Perhaps Professor Nettl should visit Czechoslovakia as soon as possible and raise his spirits.

Nation readers can't say they were not alerted to the coming events in Czechoslovakia. The editor ("The Outmoded Wall," August 28, 1967), reporting on the writers' congress in Prague, recorded his impression that "the intellectuals were capable of defending their interests; they certainly do not hesitate to say what they think about a wide range of issues." Later we ran an editorial, "The Czech Writers" (November 6, 1967) commending them for their courage but, even more than that, for their realism and sense of responsibility. We included in that issue a piece by Josef Skvorecky about modern Czech writers. Now we publish (p. 437) a remarkable article by Jiri Mucha, an outstanding Czech writer who suffered acutely under Stalin. Yet the tone and manner of his piece reflect the essential good sense, the matter-of-fact acceptance of a half-mad world, and the good humor which has survived his personal afflictions. The piece does credit both to Mucha as a man and to Czech intellectuals as a body—at least those who are anything like Mucha.

Can a revolution of intellectuals be both courageous and good-humored? Can it be carried on in a spirit of hope, warmth and freedom from egotism? Above all, can intellectuals understand that, while politicians have their problems and usually are not stupid politically, they are often stupid culturally—especially the ones who are delegated to supervise intellectuals? One must try to understand and humor them as psychiatrists deal with abnormally assertive but not hopelessly psychotic patients.

It may be too early; no one knows how events will turn out. In Poland the outlook is more ominous. The Poles have overplayed their hand repeatedly throughout their agonized history. But the Czechs have the possibility, as the president of their writers' union said recently, of "achieving what has never been done before—produce a Socialist society based on personal freedom . . . which it should have been from the beginning."

That would be a great event indeed. In the meantime, the United States is in the ridiculous position of harboring a Czech general who apparently was a Stalinist, while Czechoslovakian socialism is turning toward liberalism. With our anti-Communist obsession, the last thing we would want to see is a civilized, humane type of socialism. We have our scapegoat and we mean to keep it.

Smoke Signal

"A ghetto is a prison" is one of those reversible statements—you can as justly say "A prison is a ghetto." The force of this was evident in comments and explanations that followed the recent $2-million riot at Oregon State Penitentiary. "I don't believe the riot was planned," said State Corrections Administrator George W. Randall. "It started with a mild spark and picked up from there." Watts? Detroit? Newark?

There are other parallels. The Oregon convicts had grievances specific to their condition, but what principally riled them were more general offenses against human dignity: they had no way of communicating their complaints, they were searched without rhyme or reason, they were made to walk a line, there was no resident doctor and only one dentist for 1,400 inmates. And the style of the riot was familiar: it was not systematic, not directed at any enemy; everything was destroyed that could be destroyed, everything that would burn was burned. It was really a smoke signal, saying "Look, we are here."

Billy Ray Bolwing, serving life plus three years, summed it up: "You throw men in a cage like animals and expect them to act human." It doesn't much matter whether the cage is a cell or a tenement. Keep a man in that cage long enough, and if he has a match he will light a fire.

Red Hunting Beyond the Grave

W. E. B. DuBois was one of the great figures in American history, a leader in the struggle for the emancipation of the Negro, which is still so far from consummation. He was born in Great Barrington, Mass., in 1868, a descendant of Revolutionary ancestors and as much a New Englander as a Negro. Great Barrington, with its neighboring towns in the upper Housatonic Valley—Stockbridge, Lenox, Sheffield, Pittsfield and others—is a center of culture, and recently some of the citizens, and in particular the editors of *The Berkshire Eagle* of Pittsfield, called for a memorial to DuBois to be erected on the site of the farm where he was born.

No one denies that up to the age of 65 or so, DuBois was a great, good and learned man. He studied at Fisk, Berlin and Harvard, where he won his doctorate, and was a friend of Henry James, George Santayana and other noted teachers, who did not see what the pigmentation of a man's skin had to do with his scholarship. In 1909, he was one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and beginning in 1910 he was the editor of *The Crisis* for twenty-four years. In the opinion of most historians, black and white alike, no one has done more for the cause of Negro equality than W. E. B. DuBois.

But DuBois did not die, or retire, at 65. He lived to be 95. And as he viewed the meager progress of the Negro over his long life, and despite his own valiant efforts, he grew impatient. He accepted the Lenin peace prize, renounced his American citizenship and became a citizen of Ghana, and shortly before his death in 1963 he joined the Communist Party. Therefore, the American Legion in the neighborhood, the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the Knights of Columbus, as well as some residents who maintain that their views are unbiased, oppose the memorial.

This is a current example of the Communist phobia that has distorted the judgment of a large section of the American people for the past fifty years, with a brief interlude in World War II. In the eyes of such opponents, the taint of communism is enough to make all of a man's achievements count for naught—although there is not the slightest danger that the United States will adopt a totalitarian philosophy, except possibly fascism. The enlightened, patriotic citizens of the Housatonic Valley should be proud of their distinguished son, and they should proclaim their pride to the world by erecting the proposed monument to W. E. B. DuBois.

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VIETNAM & THE GOLD DRAIN

PETER L. BERNSTEIN
Mr. Bernstein, an investment counselor, lectures on economics at the New School for Social Research. His latest book is A Primer on Money, Banking and Gold *(Random House).*

The forces that have unleashed the crisis in gold are strikingly and distressingly similar to the forces that brought on the military crisis in Vietnam: persistent underestimation of the enemy's resources and determination, paralysis of policy and leadership, naive hopes that soothing words would make the trouble disappear and a credibility gap of appalling and widening dimensions.

This combination of circumstances makes prediction unusually difficult, but perhaps some perspective on how the United States got where it is today will provide at least a tentative look at where we might be going.

The origins of the crisis go back a full ten years to the time when it first appeared that expenditures by Americans abroad for foreign goods and services, for investments in foreign countries, in aid to developing nations, and on military activities in Europe and Asia were going chronically to exceed outlays by foreigners in the United States. For a time, foreigners were willing to hold the excess dollars they received, because Fort Knox contained more than enough gold to pay them off if they chose to cash in their chips. However, as some did cash in their chips and as our gold stock shrank, the growing accumulation of claims against our gold grew increasingly ominous to the financial communities abroad.

Yet no one could argue that the dollar was a weak currency or that America's situation was in any way comparable to Britain's. We continued to show a comfortable excess of exports over imports. We were building up an enormous array of highly profitable investments abroad—the output of American-owned enterprises around the world ranks today with the output of the entire Soviet economy. The rate of increase in our price level and wages was persistently below Western Europe's—and is likely to remain so. Our well-balanced economic growth and prosperity were the envy of the world.

Macpherson, Toronto Star
The Bullion Run

With the escalation of the war in Vietnam in late 1965, however, three things happened to intensify the difficulties that had been building up for the dollar. First, military outlays abroad turned sharply higher (and most of the outlays in Vietnam end up in French banks). Second, the overheating that developed in the economy sparked a significant increase in imports of foreign merchandise and services. Third, the war itself created among Europeans a crisis of confidence in America's leadership and use of power, leading in turn to a desire to humble us.

Led by the French, they told Washington that there was a limit to the number of dollar bills they would take to finance our deficit. De Gaulle and his associates insisted that excess payments abroad had to be settled in cash rather than in IOU's. Pressures, doubts and controversy swirled through the financial centers as the United States took only half measures to bring its affairs to order. No one could afford longer to ignore the possibility that the United States might one day have to raise the price of gold. Then the value of its gold hoard would comfortably exceed its liquid liabilities and would thus provide more breathing space to work matters out.

Some observers believe that at this point the United States made a series of strategic errors in policy. We forgot that monetary stability rests upon confidence, decisiveness and ruthlessness toward speculative forces. On the contrary, we humbly agreed with General de Gaulle that gold is the kingpin of the monetary system. Instead of stressing the dollar's enormous strength and instead of emphasizing that gold has value only because we stand ready to convert each ounce of it into $35, we followed de Gaulle right down the line by acting as though it is gold that gives value to the dollar. Thus, by pouring our golden treasure into the hands of private speculators in the hope that this would hold the price down to $35, we actually increased the likelihood that the price of gold would some day have to go up.

Consequently, the stage was set for the denouement when sterling caved in last November. Indeed, the British experience acted only to encourage the attacks on the international monetary system as a consequence of two extremely important related factors.

First, these events proved that the pledges of statesmen are never to be believed. As Abraham Lincoln reminded us (and in contrast to the rest of the world), Anglo-Saxon statesmen both want to be believed and *expect* to be believed. But when the President of the United States has declared, "We seek no wider war," and when the British Prime Minister has pledged that "We will never devalue," and when both statements turn out to have been gigantic

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and tragic untruths, the credibility gap becomes immeasurable. In this atmosphere, a pledge to preserve the $35 price for gold means nothing.

Second, the British experience showed the power that speculation can generate. Many experts doubt that the pound was fundamentally in serious trouble, although some short-run difficulties (mostly the seamen's strike and the closing of Suez) had developed. As the speculation against the pound built up, however, it became self-justifying: the lower the British exchange reserves fell, the more likely became a devaluation, which further increased the attractiveness of selling sterling; that in turn depleted the reserves further and encouraged still more selling. Recently, the identical pattern developed in the gold markets abroad: the greater the run on gold, the greater the chance of an increase in its price. Thus, speculation again became self-justifying, no longer bearing any real relationship to the strength or weakness of the dollar.

An important factor that greatly intensified the speculation was the absence of risk. The man who sold sterling in November for $2.80 knew that at worst he would not be required to pay more than $2.80 if he decided to repurchase sterling. Similarly, the man who buys gold at $35 has been reassured repeatedly that he can always sell it back for at least $35. Given the lure of gold and the disarray in which the world finds itself, the wonder is that the crisis took so long to develop.

From this it is clear that the most immediate way to stop the speculation is to give it an element of risk. Since we seem to worship too stubbornly at the feet of the golden idol to suggest that we might cut the buying price of gold, the next best thing is to allow its price to private buyers to rise above $35. The closing of the London gold pool thus serves two purposes: it ends the drain on officially owned reserves and, because it exposes the speculators for the first time to the risk of loss, it is likely to reduce the private demand.

However, in order to persuade our European friends—and adding up all the pluses and minuses they are indeed good friends—to refrain from making a fancy profit by buying gold from us at $35 and selling in the free market at a higher price, we must meet some of their demands. We shall be forced to deflate.

This is an uncomfortable, unpleasant and in many ways paradoxical condition. The pressure is clearly on to raise taxes and interest rates and to cut public spending—a move that few think will reduce prices but that most expect will reduce incomes and employment. But we are being asked to do this in an economy where industry is operating at no more than 85 per cent of capacity, where capital spending shows no real upward thrust, where inventories except in strike-infested industries are more than ample, and where consumers are saving an abnormally high proportion of their incomes. These are hardly the ingredients of a hyper-inflationary situation. Furthermore, postwar history has demonstrated repeatedly that inflationary episodes in this country are relatively brief. Finally, taking demographic and labor-supply factors into consideration, cost-push inflationary pressures in Europe are endemically more intense than they are here.

The battle for gold and the dollar thus involves much more than America's domestic economic picture. It seems odd indeed that we should squeeze ourselves down when we are not suffering from (or enjoying) excessive demands on our productive resources. It is even stranger that we should be spending $30-odd billion on a war when there are such strongly competing demands here at home. The greatest paradox of all is that a balance of payments deficit of only $2 billion to $3 billion should force our $800 billion economy into even more deflationary policies and into program cuts whose ultimate impact will fall most heavily on the poor.

This is why, in the end, Vietnam is the crux of the dilemmas that affect us at home and that shake international monetary stability. Much of the deficit in our balance of payments is well worth some sacrifice: imports provide us with goods and services we enjoy; foreign investments are highly profitable; foreign aid makes friends. But our military expenditures abroad seem to accomplish none of these objectives but do account for much more than our total balance of payments deficit. If, then, we really want to stop the golden hemorrhage, it is the military side that demands attention.

THREE PRISONERS

THE PETTY ROUTE HOME

HOWARD ZINN

Mr. Zinn, a frequent Nation *contributor, teaches courses in political theory and civil liberties at Boston University. He is the author most recently of* Vietnam: The Logic of Withdrawal (*Beacon*).

Somewhere between Bangkok and Paris on the flight home, our tensions beginning to ebb, I confessed to Dan Berrigan (after all, he is a Jesuit priest) that, despite heroic efforts to match my politicial science colleagues on the Cynicism Scale, I had somehow retained in my bones a granule of naiveté about governments, especially my own. And this despite my recent talks to students about Machiavellianism in the contemporary world, and my entranced reading of *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (which can be seen as a modern-day version of William Godwin's early anarchist novel, *Caleb Williams,* where a man is viciously hunted by *all* governments). But let me explain . . . .

The State Department had learned from Radio Hanoi that North Vietnam was about to release three captured American fliers, and had read in *The New York Times*

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(all this is known as Intelligence) that Hanoi had wired David Dellinger, inviting a "responsible representative" to come to Hanoi to receive the fliers. After Dellinger had phoned Father Berrigan at Cornell and me in Boston (What was his thinking? That the two of us might, with strain, comprise one "responsible representative"?), Ambassador-at-large Harriman's office asked for a meeting with the two emissaries before their departure. The next day, a State Department man arrived in New York, while Berrigan and I were talking with Dellinger and Tom Hayden, two veterans of the New York-to-Hanoi peace run. Hayden was also a recent escort of three prisoners of the NLF from Cambodia to the United States.

The man from State had several things on his mind. First: the government would be happy to validate our passports for travel to North Vietnam. (No, thanks, we said; we don't recognize the government's right to validate or invalidate anyone's right to travel anywhere.) Second: if the Vietnamese would like some reciprocal act, perhaps the United States could release a few captured North Vietnamese sailors. (If the circumstances of the capture were similar, these men would have been picked up at Coney Island; otherwise it was *not* a parallel offer; nevertheless, we absorbed the suggestion.)

Third (this came near the end, almost as an afterthought): we might make clear to the Vietnamese that the United States would negotiate on the basis of the San Antonio formula, and would not require, for a cessation of bombing, that the North stop all supplies to the South—only that it not increase the present flow. (I wondered if henceforth all major international crises were to be settled by formulas made in Texas towns; it seemed to me Geneva, for all its difficulties, was more neutral than San Antonio.)

However, what was most important to the man from State—quite clearly it was his main reason for approaching us—was the question: How would we return home with the fliers? By what route? By which aircraft? We didn't really know; all we had to go by was one cablegram from Hanoi. We suggested that we would wait and see what developed when we got there. To the proposal that we and the fliers all return to the States from Vientiane, Laos, by military aircraft, Father Berrigan and I said this would not please us. The man from State then said they could provide a plane which was "as far from the military as you can get"—but he did not mean Mohawk Airlines, only another kind of government plane. Nevertheless, we tentatively agreed that the decision as to how we should go would, as far as possible, be left up to the released fliers themselves.

That Wednesday evening, January 31, we departed Kennedy Airport. The next twenty-eight hours were spent almost continuously on airplanes as we dashed halfway around the globe (Copenhagen, Frankfurt, Rome, Teheran, Karachi, Calcutta, Bangkok, Vientiane) in order to intercept the Friday flight to Hanoi via Vientiane. This was a special plane run by the International Control Commission six times a month (every Friday, every other Tuesday), departing Saigon in the morning, to Phnompenh to Vientiane to Hanoi (arriving at night), and back. We made it to Vientiane on schedule, only to be informed that the NLF offensive in Saigon had closed Tan Son Nhut airport, and kept the ICC plane from taking off.

So we spent a week in Vientiane (the next scheduled flight, Tuesday, was also canceled), waiting until the plane could manage to leave Saigon. In the meantime, we visited the North Vietnamese embassy, which offered tea, sympathy and visas to Hanoi. We visited the Cambodian embassy (beginning to think the ICC plane would never make it) to obtain transit visas for Phnompenh, because the only other way to get to Hanoi is via China, and there is a flight from Phnompenh to Canton. We also approached the Chinese embassy for transit visas, but were tersely discouraged at the embassy gate, and turned our hopes to the more substantial Chinese mission in Phnompenh.

We talked with journalists (N.B.C. and C.B.S. crews had flown in from Tokyo and Seoul to record our mission). We talked with young Americans in the International Volunteer Service (these IVS people were the best informed of all; they spoke Lao or Vietnamese, lived with the villagers rather than in the sprawling American Levittown outside Vientiane, and harshly criticized United States policy in both Vietnam and Laos). We spent a day with Lao villagers, and also interviewed a Pathet Lao spokesman in Vientiane.

From time to time we met with the folk at the U.S. Embassy. (An embassy man had met us on arrival at the airport, said the Ambassador would be happy to see us, but considering the "delicacy" of our position, would understand if we did not visit him.) They asked us once again if we wanted our passports validated (the last approach was: "Not even *verbally*?"), discussed the problem of the canceled ICC flights, and once more showed great concern over how the pilots would come home. Again we agreed: we would leave it to the men themselves to decide.

My first reaction to the question of the route home was to consider it rather unimportant. Yet it became evident that the United States Government was much concerned, indeed (and this took me by surprise) apprehensive. Why? Did they want to get the pilots out of the deadly hands of the peace movement (Berrigan and Zinn)? That didn't seem to be the point; they offered to take us back on the same plane. Apparently, they did not want the pilots to meet the world press in an unfettered series of interviews—in Bangkok, Paris, New York, and wherever else the commercial airline would stop. Why? Did they think Radio Hanoi was accurate in describing the pilots as "repentant"? This did not seem likely. These were not reluctant conscripts but career military men who had gone through intensive training: an Air Force major, an Air Force captain, a Navy lieutenant. They had been prisoners a short time (all were shot down in October, 1967). And judging from the three NLF prisoners released to Tom Hayden, the other side was either not using "repentance" as a condition for release, or had very loose criteria.

What it seemed to come down to (and all this is inference, because the embassy people never discussed their anxiety explicitly; Father Berrigan and I were scarcely viewed by them as psychiatric counselors) was worry, not

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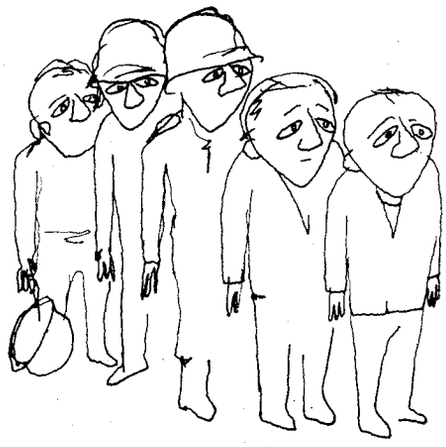

about desertion or denunciation (although this was always an outside chance) but merely the possibility of embarrassment, perhaps by the men showing a bit of warmth toward the Vietnamese, or (at the worst) offering implied criticism of the bombing of the North. We who spend much of our time denouncing governments for their insensitivity to human need cannot really comprehend how delicate are the antennae of governments to any criticism, to any disturbance of the carefully constructed but frail image they hold up to the world. Thus, Dan Berrigan and I, assuming cool rationality on the part of the Leviathan, could not predict that it would remain so fiercely determined to have its way on something as minor as the route home—and even at the risk of hurting (as it turned out) its "own."

On Friday, the 9th of February, the ICC plane got special dispensation to take off from harassed Saigon, and arrived at Vientiane, ready to take us and a handful of others (mostly ICC personnel and their families; also an elegantly dressed young British Foreign Service officer) to Hanoi. It was a very old four-engine Boeing craft; we were told that only six of them had been left in the world as of two years ago. Since then, three had crashed, including one lost with all aboard on the run from Vientiane to Hanoi (apparently shot down, but it was still a mystery).

The plane flew along a narrow, pre-arranged corridor, at prescribed altitude, at agreed-upon time and air speed (so that all those anti-aircraft batteries below would hold fire), and had a last-minute check by radio with Hanoi before take-off to make sure Hanoi was not being bombed. As we crossed the Laos-Vietnam border, the French stewardess handed out flak helmets, but it was an easy flight. Over the Hanoi airfield, a searchlight picked us out, and we were soon on the ground, received warmly by members of the Peace Committee of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, holding out two bouquets of flowers (it is hard to be unmoved when the people who have been bombed for three years by your countrymen extend their hands). Then followed an eerie auto trip through the night into Hanoi, past bombed-out buildings, anti-aircraft crews bunched in the darkness, people on foot and on bicycles moving along the road in an endless, thick stream.

In that first get-together with the Peaceniks of Hanoi (it was like visiting friends in San Francisco: "What would you like to see while you're in town, fellows?") we hit it off right away. They were a far cry from the *apparatchiks* of East or West—a relaxed bunch, young, dressed in rough jackets, hands in pocket, great guys: Oanh, Hieu, Vann, Phan. Three spoke English; one spoke French. That first night, the airmen were mentioned briefly and then that subject disappeared from the agenda while we explored people and places in Hanoi—a fascinating, intense learning of history, politics, day-to-day living. This went on for five days, and Berrigan and I were beginning to wonder about the prisoners. On Wednesday evening, returning from one of our discussions over tea, we found our friend Oanh waiting for us at the hotel. (A composer, his casual slouch deceptive; he was unerringly efficient.) He said: "Please eat supper quickly. In one hour we will meet the three prisoners."

We drove through dark streets to the prison; it seemed, like so many other government buildings, an old French villa adapted to the new exigencies. Inside, there was the usual introductory tea session. The prison commandant read us his data on the three fliers: Maj. Norris Overly, 39, flying out of a base in South Vietnam, wife and two children in Detroit; Capt. John Black, 30, flying out of Udorn airfield in Thailand, wife and three kids in Tennessee; Lt. (j.g.) David Methany, flying off an aircraft carrier, 24, single.

Then we moved into another room, where Berrigan and I were seated at a small table with two of our Peace Committee buddies. Along the wall to our right was a table for the prison commandant and his interpreter. Along the wall to our left, below a photo of Ho Chi Minh, another table with three empty places. On all the tables were tea,

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cookies, cigarettes. Hieu whispered to us: when they come in, we will introduce you briefly. He hesitated: "Whether or not you shake hands is up to you."

There was a curtained door to our left, and a very short, very tough-looking soldier came quickly through it, followed by the three fliers, who stood behind their seats, bowed to the commandant, and sat down. Dan and I were introduced. We walked over and shook hands. Then followed an hour of what can be described only as small talk: "You fellows are looking good." (They did; they looked well fed, indeed more rounded than Dan Berrigan and me, though that is not saying much.) "Where are you from?" "Oh yes, I know that town." "Do you know so-and-so in Des Moines?" And so on. An absurd conversation under the circumstances? Perhaps.

About half an hour through our chat, Major Overly became aware that we had left the Vietnamese out of the conversation, and turned to the prison commandant with a mild apology for our immersion in American-type subjects. The commandant was gracious. He wore spectacles, and his manner was mild. But he dropped one disturbing statement into the room: "You realize that if Hanoi is bombed before you leave, we may reconsider our decision to release you." Back in the hotel later, Dan and I mused and pondered over the encounter.

Hanoi had not been bombed in our first five days there, although, from the first morning, there were alerts which sent everyone into shelters. After our return to the States, newspaper men kept referring to the "bombing pause" over Hanoi—but on those five days of "the pause" the skies were completely overcast. The day after our first meeting with the fliers, Thursday, the sun shone for the first time. And on that day, the bombers came. We crowded into a shelter with several Catholic lay leaders whom we had been visiting, and heard the bombs exploding in the outer districts of Hanoi, planes droning overhead.

We wondered later about the priorities of the American Government. They knew we were in Hanoi to pick up three fliers; did it not occur to them as at least a slim possibility that to bomb Hanoi at exactly that time might endanger the release? Granted that the military objectives of the bombing were more important to the United States than any consideration for the lives of Vietnamese (with hundreds of schools, hospitals, churches destroyed; with whole villages razed, with anti-personnel bombs dropped in huge quantities, that much was clear); but were these military objectives also more important to our government than the freedom of three American fliers, who themselves had been engaged in that same military action? The insistence that the bombing should go on anyway could be seen as an admirable lack of chauvinism on the part of the U.S. Government: to it, all people, even Americans, were created equally expendable. Exactly this equalitarian ruthlessness would be revealed again (yes, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*) when we brought the three airmen back from Hanoi.

We prepared to leave Hanoi on Friday, the next scheduled departure of the ICC plane. This was two days after our first formal meeting with the airmen, one day after the bombing. As if to provide what scientists call a "control" on the thesis that a bombing "pause" meant bad weather, that Friday the skies were murky, and there was a "pause" over Hanoi.

In the afternoon, we met with Pham Van Dong, the Premier of North Vietnam, a man of high intelligence, oceanic calm, exuberant personal warmth (altogether a man of such stature as to make us cringe thinking of the Kys, Chiangs, Parks, Duvaliers, Humphreys and other leaders of the free world). His grasp of political realities was both firm and subtle: "Your leaders make a mistake when they think we are depending on the American peace movement. It is our own efforts, our own determination that we count on. We have no illusions about the power of the peace movement. However, it is a fact that as the war goes on, your own problems at home will intensify, and as the social issues in the United States become more difficult to solve, the war will become an intolerable burden on your society, and your people will demand that the war end, for their own sake."

Several hours before take-off from Hanoi, we "received" the three airmen from the North Vietnam Peace Committee in a little formal ceremony: Oanh made a brief statement for the committee; Dan Berrigan made one for us; Lieutenant Methany for the fliers. ("We thank the North Vietnamese Government for its treatment of us.") Then we went back to the hotel, where the committee had arranged for Father Berrigan and me to have supper alone with the fliers. (Throughout, the handshake incident being only one example, they treated with sensitivity our relationship with the fliers.) The supper was splendid, served by a battery of waiters (endless bowls of hot *potage,* cold cuts, chicken, bread, beer). Methany (the youngest, blond, only a few years as a Navy flier, not as sure as the other two about a military career) said, in the nearest we got to any discussion about the war: "I hope we get a chance to talk about the war with you fellows. You know, I'm a flag waver from way back; I believe in fighting to defend my country. But I hope we get to talk."

Over supper, we discussed the route home from Vientiane. We laid out the alternatives carefully: the government would probably have an Army plane waiting at Vientiane; it would get the men home faster (perhaps twelve to twenty-four hours faster) than a commercial flight. (Air France could take us from Bangkok to Paris to New York, arriving Sunday noon.) It would also mean less press harassment—although Methany had handled the press quite coolly at the just finished ceremony, despite a wild scene of flash bulbs, whirring cameras, importunate questioners from the world press. We noted that the U.S. Government obviously preferred that the men take a military plane, yet had assured us at least twice that the fliers were free to choose their own route home.

On the side of a commercial flight was only one factor: the North Vietnamese had indicated to Dan Berrigan and me that (without setting it as a condition for the release) they would not be pleased if the fliers were immediately trundled into a military plane and taken to a military base. Somehow, they thought that would violate the spirit of the release. It was not that they had illusions about the men rejecting military life after their arrival in the States;

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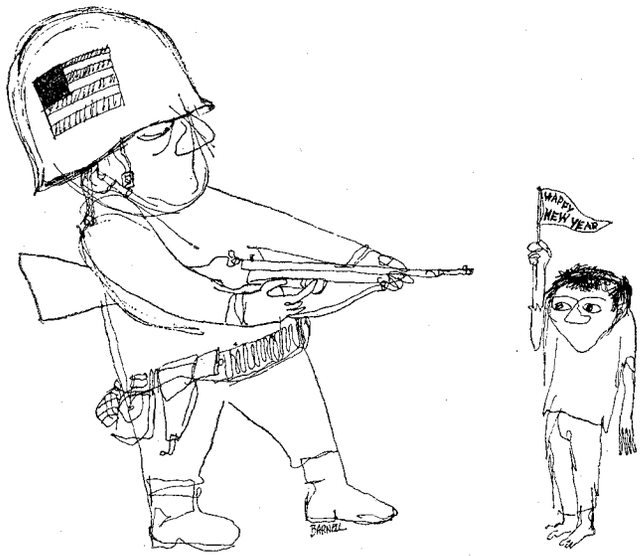
indeed, they had said to Berrigan and me that it was even conceivable that the three would return to bomb North Vietnam again, and that this would sadden them. But even if this occurred, they said, they would retain their basic feeling that the American people, even the American fighting men, were not their enemies.

After that summary of the alternatives, Major Overly spoke very firmly: "Our first concern must be for the fellow prisoners we left behind, and the possibility of



future releases by the North Vietnamese. It's clear that we should go back to the States together by commercial flight." The other two agreed immediately.

The flight from Hanoi to Vientiane was smooth; the stewardess served candies and aperitifs and we all relaxed. I sat between Major Overly and Captain Black. Father Berrigan sat with Methany. Overly told me about his experiences in captivity. "I was shot down north of the DMZ. The next twenty-eight days—the trek, under military guard, north to Hanoi—were an experience I never want to have again. I was abused, spat on, threatened, beaten. But I could understand exactly why those people would want to kill me. My guard saved my life three times. It was all strange. One moment, someone would want to kill me. The next minute another Vietnamese would act toward me with such compassion that it just staggered me. I had a huge infection on my back and was in great pain. They gave me sulfa, and after a long time it was cured. When I got to the regular prison, the worst was over. We were well treated. I got no indoctrination, just a few books on Vietnamese history. We got plenty to eat, medical care as needed. The Air Force has a rule against men shot down returning to the combat zone; that's fine with me. I've got three years to go before I can retire. I'd like to do something State-side maybe."

Overly and Black knew I had written some books; they wondered how they could get copies. I promised to send them some, took their addresses. Overly said: "Before this trip is over, I'm going to tell you my whole story, in detail. I think we owe that much to you fellows."

That never happened. As we taxied into the Vientiane airfield, the pilot relayed a message from the tower: "Will the five men connected with the prisoner release please remain aboard the plane while the other passengers descend?" We could see a great gathering on the field of newsmen, cameras, lights. The other passengers got off. Four neatly dressed men got on, and introduced themselves. One was the American Ambassador to Laos, William Sullivan. The others were his air attaché, his naval attaché, his press attaché. Sullivan asked the fliers if they needed medical attention. (His whole manner was crisp, neat, cool toward the three; but perhaps Berrigan and I could not understand the sentiment that lies beneath official exteriors—did not McNamara choke up when saying good-by to the Pentagon?) They said no, they had no urgent medical problems. (One of the statements made later by a Navy spokesman was that the men took military planes so they could have medical attention. We have developed the technology of the lie far beyond the crude days of the Commandments.)

Sullivan moved quickly to his most important business: "You men can choose whether you go home by commercial line or by military plane. However, you do understand that you are still members of the armed forces, and it is my duty to report to you that the Department of Defense has expressed the preference that you go home by military aircraft. About 100 feet away on this airfield is an Army jet, waiting and ready to take the three of you to Udorn Airfield in Thailand, and then tomorrow you will fly home. I might add that this decision was made in Washington." He hesitated just a moment. "Indeed, it comes from the White House."

There was a bit of silence. Then Major Overly responded. "Sir, I have been in the Air Force seventeen years, and when my government speaks like that, I know what it means. We will go back by military aircraft." Captain Black quickly assented. Lieutenant Methany was obviously upset. He said: "Wait a minute. Let's talk about this." Then followed forty minutes of tense argument in the confines of the old Boeing plane. We agreed on the advantages of the military plane (speed, less harassment by the press), but asked if this overrode the matter of future prisoner releases by the North Vietnamese. Whether or not the Vietnamese released future prisoners, the Ambassador said, was a cold matter of political calculation with them. (In the grade-B movies about the Red Menace, the thickset man with the heavy Russian accent says: "There is no room for sentiment in our considerations, comrades." We have not yet done justice in grade-A movies to the same point made by slim, dapper men, speaking in our own clear tongue.)

The Ambassador turned to me: "I didn't know the North Vietnamese were setting conditions for this release." They were not setting conditions, I replied; it was a more subtle problem, one of psychology and spirit. The Ambassador questioned how we knew this was indeed what the North Vietnamese preferred. Major Overly cut in: "The North Vietnamese told us exactly the same thing." (This was news to me; I had not known that they expressed their feelings also to the fliers.)

What advantage of the military plane, we persisted, could be more important than the question of future

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prisoner releases? Well, the Ambassador countered, it might be hurtful to such releases if the men met the press and said the wrong things. We told about the very first press encounter in Hanoi, where the fliers had handled themselves admirably, with no embarrassment to anyone. Besides, the simple device of a prepared statement could take care of such problems. So: what other objection was there?

The Ambassador could only keep saying: "They have considered all the alternatives in Washington before making their decision. The best minds in Washington have been involved." (We let this slide; the NLF offensive was still going on, so why rub it in about the "best minds"?) We did suggest that the men in Washington, smart as they were, had not been recently in North Vietnam, had not spoken with North Vietnamese, were hardly in a position to judge this specific situation as well as the fliers or us. Sullivan's reply, a stunning *non sequitur,* was a good example of how an intelligent man, trapped in a bureaucratic decision, makes unintelligent statements: "The man in Washington who had much to do with this decision came out of a Japanese prison camp in 1945 weighing 97 pounds."

Berrigan had had enough. "Let's go," he said to me. The fliers were very troubled. Methany was fighting back some indefinable emotion. They shook our hands. "We're sorry," they kept repeating. "Good luck," we said. Overly whispered something to me, quite warm, quite personal. They walked out, talked to the cameras, lights, crowding newsmen, then went to the Army jet. They were no longer prisoners, yet not quite free.

As I write this, two weeks later, that argument about the route home seems as it did at the start of our trip, ludicrously trivial; an almost childish dispute on both sides. Three men released from war—how puny a fact was even that, with millions still trapped in the cauldron of death that is Vietnam. Why should these be released, these who dutifully bombed villages, roads, people, schools (not deliberately, let's agree—only inevitably)? Why not the three tiny Vietnamese kids we found one day squatting in the entrance to the air-raid shelter? Perhaps there was a larger issue involved. Perhaps we move closer to the end of the war whenever even one of the parties shows compassion, in a unilateral act, and toward the most guilty of warriors—the blind bombardiers.

Now don't get sentimental, even my most radical friends insist; there must have been *some* political motive on the part of the North Vietnamese in this prisoner release. Well, all right. But all decent acts in this world are marred to some degree by selfish motivation; if we let that fact determine how we respond to such acts, the possibility of ending the vicious cycle of reciprocal cruelty is foreclosed. If people and nations can react only on the basis of the most cynical interpretations of the other party's conduct, the world doesn't have much of a chance.

There is something else. I asked Oanh that last day (as we sat next to each other at a little good-by luncheon) if there wasn't *something* we should ask from the U. S. Government in return for the release. He shook his head. "You don't understand. We have released these men in the time of our lunar New Year. That is a very important holiday to us, very deep in our tradition. It is the time when, wherever we are, we return to our families for the New Year. So, we thought of a small gesture, even in the midst of war, in the spirit of the holiday: to release three men to go back to their families." And so they preferred that the fliers return directly to their homes, rather than what did take place: the immediate flight of the pilots to the very air base in Thailand from which one of the men (Black) had taken off to bomb North Vietnam.

Against the cynicism of the Ambassador (as well as my own) another fact must be measured: it is canonized in the revolutionary ideology of North Vietnam that enemy soldiers are to be treated with compassion. From the start of the war against the French, Ho Chi Minh insisted on this. In a message (September 26, 1945) meant not for the world but for his own troops, he said: "I want to recommend to our Southern compatriots just one thing: as far as the Frenchmen captured in the war are concerned, we must watch them carefully, but we must also treat them generously. We must show to the world, and to the French people in particular, that we want only independence and freedom, that we are not struggling for the sake of individual enmity and rancor. We must show to the world that we are an intelligent people, more civilized than the homicidal invaders."

The word Ho used was "show," not "tell." If the prisoner release was "propaganda" (as newspaper men kept saying, before and after our flight to Hanoi) it was propaganda by *deed,* which, if generally adopted, would improve the world overnight. The United States, if envious, could respond with its own propaganda move: stopping the bombing in the North. Or with the greatest propaganda of all: withdrawing all its bombers, all its guns and troops, from Vietnam.

The pinched, mean reaction to the prisoner release (a "propaganda ploy," *Life* said lifelessly) is an indicator of what has happened to the spirit of generosity we always liked to believe was characteristic of America. Some future generation will catch the irony better: that a tiny country, under daily attack, should deliver back to the behemoth three of its marauders. And the behemoth, meanwhile, seeks to imprison five men who have not bombed or killed a single soul—but who have spoken the forbidden words to the behemoth's children: Thou Shalt Not Kill.

Whatever softening possibility came from that small act of the Vietnamese was destroyed by this country's fear. Never in history has a country been so rich, so powerful, and so fearful. In this case, it was a fear of something as small as three very straight American airmen saying something that would slightly embarrass Washington—an event so unlikely, and so minor if it did occur, that only a government almost hysterical in its anxiety would behave as ours did. True, a government so harassed by fact as ours today, so trembling on the brink, fears even the slightest nudge, the smallest breeze from an unexpected direction. It refuses to take even the tiniest of risks.

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In risk, however, lies the only hope of escape from deep troubles—the risk of humane response to humane acts, or even the risk of unilateral initiatives. This is not possible, however, when a nation has forgotten its professed values and is instead obsessed with political advantage as an ultimate objective, when it has adopted as a universal criterion for all its actions that of Colonel Cathcart in *Catch-22*, who measured everything in the world by a simple test: "Will it give me a black eye, or put a feather in my cap?" Our sickness is even worse than that, because our single test is (and we are ready to blow up the world on the results): will it give *them* a black eye, or a feather in their cap?

This obsessive fear, that if the next point is won or lost, the game, the world, and all the galaxies are lost (those deadly dominoes again), leads to disregard not only of the lives of the enemy's children but of one's own. When the American people discover this—that our government is not only indifferent to whether the Vietnamese live or die but also to whether Americans live or die—then we shall have a great commotion through the land, and the war will come to a grinding halt.

THIS SPRING IN PRAGUE

JIRI MUCHA

Mr. Mucha, one of Czechoslovakia's most distinguished writers, is the author most recently of Living and Partly Living, *an account of his stay in a Czech prison during the Stalin era. He was sentenced to six years, spent some time in solitary confinement, and later worked in a coal mine.*

Prague

As the winter wears on toward spring, a hopeful, invigorating atmosphere can be sensed in this old wistful town. After a dangerous December ("another Hungary?," asked the *Frankfurter Allgemeine,* a usually well-informed paper) things seem to be settling down. A new pattern slowly emerges, and with it new people. No doubt the unyielding stand of the writers, following their much publicized summer meeting, was what triggered the events. The underlying malaise, till then carefully camouflaged, was forced into the open, and progressive elements within the party were able to judge on whose side the majority of the population stood. The outcome is known; the old guard was outvoted, a new first secretary was elected in a secret ballot, and the road became open to sweeping changes.

A preliminary draft for the future policy of the party, issued on the 19th of February, opened to discussion subjects that hitherto have been presented as doctrine, and made no hazy excuses for failures of the past. Among the subjects brought up for debate was the dominant role of the party itself, a crucial problem of Socialist structure. The assumption of party supremacy, applied rigorously and without exception, has led to results that might be compared to the trials of a distance runner, obliged to obey the orders of his coach at every step. Now it seems that a more subtle approach will be sought, a more remote control giving some discretion both to individuals and to various forms of enterprise.

An equally important paragraph deals with personal liberties. If, as it claims, the draft wants to secure greater freedom for the individual than exists in fact in capitalist society, then it must face the need to abolish at least those restrictions that do not exist in the other system. No less interesting is the stress the document lays on building up the authority of the Parliament and the constitution, hitherto endowed only with symbolic power. Intellect is to be the governing consideration, and socialism will thus catch up with the requirements of the technical revolution.

The fact that while these principles were being proclaimed, radio and television were being given almost complete freedom for the expression of opinions, indicates at last a readiness to match action to theory. It seems to me that never, since Stalin's dethronement, has there been so much frank public criticism. The difference is that after Stalin comment smacked of bitter disillusion, while now there is good will and people are ready to lend a hand. After years of stock phrases and resigned lassitude, one hears words worth thinking about.

All this sounds surprisingly cheerful, given the Czechs' ingrained skepticism, but it is the feeling that prevails here today. A tooth that stops aching produces euphoria, even though one knows the hole is still there and must be filled eventually. And in any case, I do not think a return to the old methods is possible. The people now at the top know that they can succeed only if they attract wide popular support. Should they fail the public, the country would revert to morose indifference and it would be almost impossible to rouse it again. Every new society must reclaim all the freedoms that had been attained in the past, but were then lost in the process of gaining others.

As for the writers who have played such an important part in these events, they have seen most of their wrongs made good. They got back their weekly paper, which as punishment had been handed over to the ministry of culture, and the man who agreed to be its officially appointed editor in chief earned general scorn. Moreover, a complaint that has been lodged with the journalists' union demands an investigation of the whole matter. This and the way in which the paper was restored to the writers are good examples of the new approach to political issues. Despite the government's new pledge, the ministry of culture was reluctant to vacate the paper's premises and delayed the registration of the new weekly. Not long ago, this sort of contest would have been waged behind closed doors, the public being informed only of its result. But this time the Writers' Union sent a complaint to the government and handed the full text to the press, which published it under big headlines. The ministry was obliged

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to make a statement, defending itself as best it could, and shortly thereafter it gave way. The procedure would have been unthinkable even two months ago.

Preliminary censorship of films has either been or is in the process of being abolished. All film scripts awaiting decision for the last ten months or more have been passed for production—a relaxation vital for the survival of the "Czech Wave." Books waiting years for publication have gone to press. The whole question of censorship—the focus of the writers' concentrated attack—is being examined anew.

As a matter of fact, I am not an unconditional enemy of censorship. Paradoxically, it is a tangible proof of the writer's impact on the public—even though, I fear, the effect is not as great as the censor likes to imagine. It is a tribute, a grim tribute, to the writer from someone who rather dislikes him. As long as there is a censor, the writer is never alone, he knows he will have at least one attentive reader, and his feeling of importance is in direct proportion to the number of sentences deleted.

However, few writers here share my views on this matter. At present, they are wary, waiting to see whether the present benevolence will be permanent. For the present, they feel a strong attraction to the new regime and are willing to support it wholeheartedly, knowing that if it means serious business it will sooner or later run into trouble. There will be much opposition to its program, much ill will. The stagnant, unproductive part of the population, which was the main support of the old guard, will be shocked to find that it can no longer fatten on egalitarianism, that mediocrity can no longer defend itself against wit by accusing active minds of anti-social individualism. There will be no work for loafers and no money without work. It is an obvious economic principle, but alas not so obvious in a Socialist state.

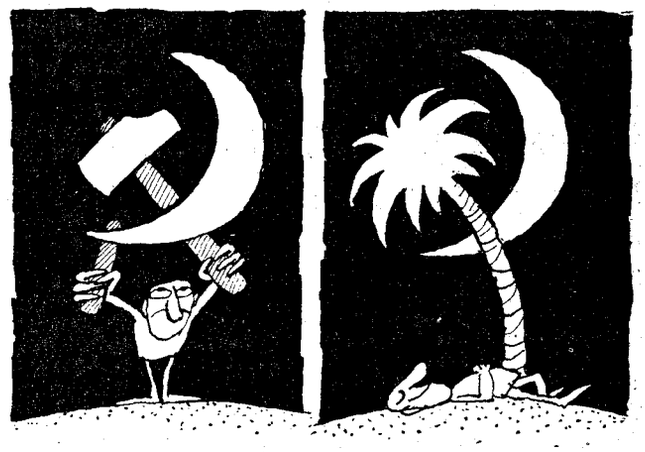
If truly democratic relations are re-established in the country, the writers will no doubt be on the government's side. I hope, however, that as in the past they will keep one or two steps ahead, mobilizing public opinion against the temptation to compromise, and enjoying, at least for some time to come, the honor of being censored.

On the morning of March 18, The Nation *received from Mr. Mucha the following postscript to his article:*

Events that were galloping in Czechoslovakia seem to have reached a moment of marking time. Tomorrow or the day after will probably bring more big news, but as of now the new forces are consolidating their gains and probing the ground for a further thrust. Radio and TV are flooding the country with harangues, discussions, commentaries and attacks on top figures of state so vehement that many ordinary people are frightened by the unaccustomed freedom. It is difficult to say exactly what worries them. When I ask the question they shrug, remarking that "It can't be good," or that "There must be some limit." Probably they fear that an atmosphere so suddenly permissive will produce a reaction of strict and severe control. They agree wholeheartedly with the issues, but smell the bonfires.

And they want their peace—a mediocre, slightly sordid and unostentatious peace of body and mind. It took them twenty years to attain a degree of constitutional security. Private property is once more guaranteed, the laws now offer a fair amount of protection, it is even possible to make money—not much, but enough to annoy the neighbors. So why, in a world bristling with rockets and gallows, run unnecessary risks for moral principles?

According to a recent poll, however, 55 per cent of the population has declared itself emphatically in support of the new way, the rest being either indifferent or without an opinion. Only 1 per cent is against change. But—and this I think is the crux of the situation now developing—what exactly is this new way; where does it lead? No one



Picha (Belgium): Ben Roth

The De-Stalinization of Czechoslovakia

should suppose that what is taking place in Prague is some Castroism, Maoism, Titoism, or whatever variant "ism" of Communist rule. If the road goes on, it will lead—for the first time in history—to a free, nontotalitarian state, testing, with the general consent of the population and under conditions of true democratic freedom, new patterns of a working Socialist order.

This, I agree, sounds somewhat less plausible than the promise that a wolf will change into a sheep. But from here, and when one looks back into Czech history, the prospect is credible enough. Czechoslovakia is the only country of the whole Socialist bloc that has the advantage of a serious democratic experience and background. (I apologize if this sounds rude to our Polish or Hungarian neighbors.) The country's experience in the 1930s of being a working democracy surrounded by totalitarian states cannot be forgotten—the more so since it was living up in those years to the whole history of the country. For more than 1,000 years the region had been an outpost of progressive ideas.

Prewar Czechoslovakia, led by the philosopher, Masaryk, trusted more in its ideas than in its industry and weapons, even though it had become an industrial power supplying or smuggling weapons to the trouble spots of five continents. The fact that Czech democracy was beaten at Munich, means only that the ardent but frail idealism of the Czechs was incongruous in a world rushing toward war. Now—and this is where Czechoslovakia links up with its history—the country will try again. In a world

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bristling with rockets and gallows, it wants to create a free, democratic state, based on Socialist economic principles. It was no idle symbolism that moved the papers to publish on March 7, Masaryk's birthday, the first long articles about him that have appeared here in twenty years. And the students were not indulging in nostalgia when they laid wreaths on his grave. What Masaryk did, the people want to do again, under different conditions and with somewhat different premises, but in the same conviction that truth, freedom and decency must prevail. If we succeed, we shall prove that it has been worth while living through these last twenty years.

THE COUNTER CULTURE: PART II

POLITICS of the NERVOUS SYSTEM

THEODORE ROSZAK
Mr. Roszak, an associate professor of history, is chairman of the History of Western Culture Program at California State College, Hayward. He edited and contributed to The Dissenting Academy *(Pantheon Books).*

On October 21, the Pentagon was besieged by a motley army of civil demonstrators. For the most part, the 50,000 protesters were made up of activist academics and students, men of letters, New Left and pacifist ideologues, housewives, doctors and such. But also, we are informed: "witches, warlocks, holy men, seers, prophets, mystics, saints, sorcerers, shamans, troubadours, minstrels, bards, road men, and madmen"—who were on hand to achieve the "mystic revolution." The picketing, the sit-down, the speeches and marches: all that was protest politics as usual. But the central event of the day was a contribution of the "superhumans": an exorcism of the Pentagon by long-haired warlocks who "cast mighty words of white light against the demon-controlled structure," in the hope of levitating that grim ziggurat.

They did not succeed—in floating the Pentagon, that is. But they did manage to convey their generation's political style, a style so authentically original as to border on the bizarre. If the youthful political activism of the sixties differs from that of the thirties, the difference reveals itself in an unprecedented penchant for the occult, for magic, and for exotic ritual which has become an integral part of the counter culture. Even protesters who didn't participate in the rite of exorcism took the event in stride—as if they understood that here was the style and vocabulary of the young, and one had to tolerate its expression.

Religiosity has been characteristic of the postwar youth culture since the days of the beatniks. One finds the quest for God in many of the earliest poems of Allen Ginsberg, well before he and his colleagues had discovered Zen and the mystic wealth of the East. In his poetry of the forties, he showed a sensitivity for visionary experience—"Angelic raving" as he was to call it—which suggested even then that the social dissent of the younger generation would never quite fit into the adamantly secular mold of the old Left. Ginsberg spoke then of seeing

> *all the pictures we carry in our mind*
> *images of the Thirties,*
> *depression and class consciousness*
> *transfigured above politics*
> *filled wih fire*
> *with the appearance of God.*

These early poems contrast strongly with Ginsberg's style today. They are often brief, tightly written affairs, done in a short, orderly line. The more familiar Ginsberg line, rambling and ham-fisted (the line based on "Hebraic-Melvillian bardic breath") does not appear until the 1949 poem "Patterson." But the religiosity was already there, giving his work a sound very different from the social poetry of the thirties. From the outset, Ginsberg was a protest poet, but his protest runs back not to Marx but to the ecstatic radicalism of Blake. The issue is never as simple as social justice; rather the key words and images are those of time and eternity, madness and vision, heaven and the spirit. And as early as the later forties Ginsberg is experimenting with marijuana and writing poems under the sway of narcotics.

By the early fifties, Ginsberg had abandoned the conventional virtues of poetry in favor of a spontaneity that comes across as an unchecked flow of language. From then on, everything he writes has the appearance of being served up raw. There is never the trace of a revised line; rather, another line is added on: instead of revision, there is accumulation. To rework would be to rethink, hence to doubt the initial vision. For Ginsberg, the creative act was to be a "come-as-you-are" party. Lack of grooming marks his poems as "natural," therefore honest. They are the *real* thing, not artifice.

There is a good deal of Charlie Parker's improvisation in Ginsberg's work, and of the action painters. Jackson Pollock worked at a canvas with a commitment never to erase or redo or touch up; but to add, add, add, and let it all somehow work itself into a pattern. Similarly, Jack Kerouac came to the point of typing out his novels nonstop onto enormous rolls of paper—6 feet a day—with never a revision. At last, a deal of Ginsberg's late work sounds very much as if it were taken off a tape recorder as dictated.

That this improvisatory method of writing produces a great deal of trash is, for our purposes here, less important than the light this choice of method throws on the generation that accepted Ginsberg's work as a valid form of creativity. It is a search for art unmediated by intellect; or rather, since the application of intellectual control is what makes art of impulse, it is an effort to extract and indulge the impulse, without regard to the nature of the product.

Poetry defined as an oracular outpouring has a genealogy running back through the Hebrew prophets to the

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shamans of dim antiquity. The Hebrew term for prophet is *nabi*: mutterer, babbler, one who speaks with tongues. Unhappily, Ginsberg is no Amos (though perhaps we should have a poorer opinion of Amos if we had the whole of his life's utterances to get through instead of only the most elegant passages), but he belongs within that tradition. He belongs there, however, not as an artist but as a conjurer with subterranean forces, a kind of witch doctor. It is as if, initially, Ginsberg set out to write poetry: to say something about the anguished state of the world. What came of that was a howl. But at the bottom of the howl Ginsberg discovered what it was that Moloch was most intent upon burying: the non-intellective powers.

Every artist has discovered something of that in the creative process. What sets Ginsberg's career apart is that, having once experienced the powers, he set out to make over as much of his own life and as much of the culture as he could lay hold of in the image of that experience. For Ginsberg the use of narcotics was not simply a perverse Bohemian vice; it was another, more effective way of short-circuiting the intellect and tapping the energy beyond. It was a way of subverting Moloch by reorganizing the politics of the nervous system.

There is something more to be noted about the visionary impulse in Ginsberg's work and life. The ecstatic power he and most of the early Beat writers reached for was never sought in other-worldly sources. Their mysticism was never escapist or ascetic; it did not lead them, like T. S. Eliot, into a transcendent rose garden. Theirs was to be a this-worldly mysticism, an ecstasy of the body and of the earth that somehow would embrace and transform mortality. Joy was to be had even (or perhaps especially) in the commonplace obscenities of existence. As Ginsberg put it in one of his early poems:

> *This is the one and only*
> *firmament . . .*
> *I am living in Eternity.*
> *The ways of this world*
> *are the ways of Heaven.*

Or, even more powerfully:

> *For the world is a mountain*
> *of shit, if it's going to*
> *be moved at all, it's got*
> *to be taken by handfulls.*

William Carlos Williams observed in the poems of the young Ginsberg "a beat that is far removed from the beat of dancing feet, but rather finds in the shuffling of human beings in all the stages of their life, the trip to the bathroom, to the stairs of the subway, the steps of the office or factory routine, the mystical measure of their passions." This is, in fact, a remarkable anticipation of the Zen doctrine of the "illuminated commonplace."

Popular Zen

If one can believe the account Jack Kerouac gives in *The Dharma Bums*, the book which was to provide the first handy compendium of all those Zen catch phrases that have since become more familiar to contemporary youth than any Christian catechism, it was from the West Coast poet, Gary Snyder, that he and Ginsberg learned their Zen upon going to San Francisco in the early fifties. But behind Snyder stood Alan Watts, who had recently begun teaching at the School of Asian Studies after leaving his position as an Anglican counselor at Northwestern University. When he arrived in San Francisco, Watts, who was only 35 years old in 1950, had written at least seven books dealing with Zen and mystical religion. He had in fact, been a child prodigy in his chosen field of study: at 19, he was appointed editor of *The Middle Way*, an English journal of Buddhist studies, and at 23, co-editor of the English "Wisdom of the East" series. Along with D. T. Suzuki, Watts, through his televised lectures, books and private classes, was to become America's foremost popularizer of Zen.

Of the two, Watts's influence has been the more widespread, for often at the expense of risking vulgarization, he has made a most determined effort to translate the insights of Zen and Taoism into the language of Western science and psychology. He has approached the task with an impish willingness to be catchy and cute, and to play at philosophy as if it were an enjoyable game. It is a style that has exposed him to a deal of rather arrogant criticism, on the one hand from serious Zen devotees who have found him too discursive for their mystic tastes (I recall one such telling me bluntly, "Watts has never experienced satori"), and on the other from professional philosophers who have been inclined to ridicule his popularizing bent as making him, in the words of one academic, "the Norman Vincent Peale of Zen." It is the typical and inevitable sort of resistance encountered by anyone who makes bold to find a greater audience for an idea than the academy or any restricted cult can provide—and it overlooks the fact that Watts's books include such solid intellectual achievements as *Psychotherapy East and West*.

There is a sense, however, in which it would seem impossible to "popularize" Zen. Traditionally, the insights of the religion have been communicated only directly from master to student as part of an extremely demanding discipline in which verbal formulations play almost no part. Zen is neither a proselytizing creed nor a theology but a personal illumination that one must be tricked into while intellectually off guard. Thus, the best way to teach Zen might be to talk about anything but Zen, allowing the illumination to break through of its own unpredictable accord—which is rather the way the composer, John Cage, one of Suzuki's students, uses his music. Similarly, I have watched one of Watts's colleagues in San Francisco try to bring students around to the key experience through what purported to be rehearsals of a drama that was never intended to reach production. Much the same intention seems to underlie the sensory awareness classes of Charlotte Selver, with whom Watts often works.

If this sort of psychic jujitsu is the essence of Zen, then it may very well be that on the religion's own terms, all the youthful confabulation with Zen over the past decade or so has been less than useless. "Those who know do not speak; those who speak do not know"—and I would have to leave it to the Zen adepts to decide whether anything that deserves to be called authentic has actually taken root in our culture. What is indisputable, however, is that the

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San Francisco Beats, and much of our younger generation since, *thought* they had found in Zen something they needed, and that they proceeded to use what they understood of this exotic tradition to fulfill the need. The situation is rather similar to Schopenhauer's attempt to integrate his limited knowledge of the Upanishads into a philosophy that was primarily an expression of his generation's Romantic melancholia.

What did Zen offer or seem to offer to the young? It is difficult to avoid feeling that Zen's great advantage is its unusual vulnerability to what one might call "adolescentization." Zen, vulgarized, dovetails remarkably with a number of adolescent traits. Its commitment to a wise silence, which contrasts so strongly with the preachiness of Christianity, can easily ally with the inarticulateness of youth. Why do Zen masters throw their disciples into a mud puddle?, asks Kerouac's Sal Paradise in *The Dharma Bums*. "That's because they want them to realize mud is better than words." A generation that had come to admire the tongue-tied incoherence of James Dean and which has been willing to believe that the medium is the message, would welcome a tradition that regards talking as beside the point. Similarly, Zen's commitment to paradox and randomness could be conveniently identified with the intellectual confusion of unformed and restless minds. Perhaps above all, Zen's antinomianism could serve as a sanction for the adolescent need of freedom, especially for those who possessed a healthy distaste for the competitive exactions and conformities of the middle-class life from which they came.

The Radical East

But with that much granted, it must also be recognized that what the young were vulgarizing in this way was a body of thought which, as formulated by men like Suzuki and Watts, constituted a radical critique of the conventional scientific conception of man and nature, which has been long due for reappraisal. Even if they seized on Zen with shallow understanding, they grasped it with a healthy instinct. And grasping it, they bought the books, and attended the lectures, and spread about the catch phrases and, in general, helped to provide the platform from which a few good minds who understood more deeply could speak out in criticism of the dominant culture. Perhaps what the young took to be Zen has little relationship to that venerable and elusive tradition; but what they went for was a gentle and gay rejection of a positivistic and compulsively cerebral technological society.

This is another way of saying that beyond a certain point it becomes little better than pedantic to ask how authentically "Buddhist" are poems like Ginsberg's "Sunflower Sutra" (1955). Perhaps not very, but it *is* a poem of great tenderness, expressing an unashamed wonder for the commonplace splendors of the world and calling into question that anthropocentric arrogance with which our society, in the name of progress, has gone about mechanizing and brutalizing its environment. And it is a commentary on the state of what our society regards as its "religion" that the poet who still commands the greatest attention among our youth should have had to cast about for an exotic tradition from which to take inspiration in expressing these humane sentiments.

The same holds true for Ginsberg's more recent interest in Hinduism. It is, at the very least, a fascinating Odyssey of the contemporary spirit that takes a young Jewish poet from Paterson, N.J., to the banks of the Ganges to become America's most renowned Hindu Brahman. But is his Hinduism the real thing? Again, the question is beside the point. What is far more important is his deeply felt need to turn away from the dominant culture in order to find the spirit for such remarkable poems as "The Wichita Vortex Sutra" and "Who Be Kind To"—both compelling expressions of humanity and compassionate protest. And even more important is the social fact: Ginsberg the mantra-chanting Hindu does not finish as an isolated eccentric but rather as one of the foremost spokesmen of the younger generation.

Following Ginsberg, the boys and girls don cowbells and tuck flowers behind their ears—and listen. Ginsberg claims a greater audience among dissenting youth than any Christian or Jewish clergyman could hope to reach or stir. Perhaps the one exception to this might have been the late A. J. Muste in the final years of his life. But then Muste always kept his ministerial identity as unobtrusive as possible.

After Christianity

Indeed, we are in a post-Christian era, despite the fact that minds far more gifted than Ginsberg's—like that of Thomas Merton—continue to mine the dominant religious tradition for good treasures. But it has been a decided mistake to expect that the death of the Christian God would be followed by a thoroughly secularized, thoroughly positivistic culture, dismal and spiritless in its obsession with technological prowess. That was the world Aldous Huxley foresaw in the 1930s when he wrote *Brave New World*. But in the 1950s, detecting the rising spirit of a new generation, Huxley's utopian image had brightened to that of *Island*, where prevailed a nonviolent culture elaborated out of Buddhism and psychedelic drugs. It was as if suddenly he had seen an emerging possibility: beyond the Christian era and the "wasteland" that was its immediate successor, might lie a new, eclectic religious revival.

That is precisely what confronts us now as one of the massive facts of our youthful counter culture. The dissenting young have indeed got religion. It is not the brand of religion that Billy Graham or William Buckley would choose for youth's crusade, but nonetheless it is religion. What began with Zen has now rapidly, perhaps too rapidly, proliferated into a phantasmagoria of exotic religiosity.

Who would have predicted it? At least since the Enlightenment, perhaps with the exception of the early Romantics, the major thrust of *avant-garde* thought has always been anti-religious, if not defiantly atheistic. And even among the Romantics, the most pious tended to become the most politically reactionary. Would-be Western revolutionaries have always been strongly rooted in a militantly skeptical secular tradition. Rejection of a corrupted religious establishment has carried over almost automatically into a root and branch rejection of all things

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spiritual. "Mysticism" has always been one of the dirtiest words in the Marxist lexicon.

But now the psychedelic weeklies, sprouting like mushrooms across the land, splash across their pages pictures of Christ and the prophets, mishmashed mind-bogglingly with Zen, Hinduism, primitive shamanism, theosophy, the Left-Handed Tantra. The youthful counter culture is aclutter with satanists and neo-gnostics, would-be witch doctors and self-proclaimed swamis. The Berkeley "wandering priest" Charlie (Brown) Artman, who was in the running for city councilman in 1966 until he was busted for confessing to possession of narcotics, strikes the right note of eclectic religiosity: a stash of LSD in his Indian-sign necklace, Hindu cowbells, and the campaign slogan, "May the baby Jesus open your mind and shut your mouth."

No anti-Vietnam War demonstration would be complete without a hirsute, bell-festooned contingent of holy men, bearing joss sticks and intoning the *Hare Krishna*. *The Berkeley Barb*, an underground weekly, gives LBJ a good left-wing slamming on page 1, but devotes the center spread to a crazy mandala for the local yogis. And in its back pages, the "Servants of Awareness," "a unique group of aware people using 136 symbols in their meditation to communicate directly with *Cosmic Awareness* . . . ," are sure to take a 4-inch ad. The San Francisco *Oracle* runs photos of stark-naked madonnas with flowers in their hair, suckling their babies . . . and the effect is not at all pornographic, nor intended to be.

At the level of youth, the mid-1960s begin to resemble nothing so much as a cultic hothouse of the Hellenistic period, when every manner of mystery and fakery, ritual and rite, intermingled in a marvelous indiscrimination. And, for the time being, the situation makes it next to impossible for many of us who teach to convey much in the way of education to the radical young, given the fact that the conventional curriculum, even at its best, is grounded in the dominent Western tradition. If you asked the kids to identify (a) Milton and (b) Pope, their answers are likely to be: (a) Milton *who*? and (b) which Pope? But they may do no mean job of rattling off their *Kabbala* or *I Ching* (which the very hip get married to these days) or, of course, the *Kama Sutra*.

Magic & Counter Magic

What the counter culture offers, then, is a remarkable defection from the long-standing tradition of skeptical, secular intellectuality that has served as the prime vehicle for 300 years of scientific and technical development in the West. Almost overnight (astonishingly, and with no great debate on the point), a significant portion of the younger generation has withdrawn from that tradition, as if to provide an emergency balance, often by occult aberrations just as gross, to the gross distortions of technological society. As often happens, one cultural exaggeration calls forth another to be its opposite equivalent. In the hands of a Herman Kahn, science, logic and the precision of numbers have become their own caricatures as part of a mystogogy of mass murder. Even official Washington calls its Sino-Soviet advisers "demonologists"—and the designation is scarcely a wisecrack. Mumbo-jumbo is indeed at the heart of human affairs when so-called scientific decision making reveals itself as a species of voodoo. ("Crack-pot realism," C. Wright Mills called it; and Allen Ginsberg "a communion of bum magicians.")

When science and reasons of state become handmaidens of political black magic, who can blame the young for

diving headlong into the Jungian stew, in search of "good vibrations" that might ward off the bad? Of course, they are soon glutted with what they find. Whole religious traditions become baubles to play with. A light-show group in Detroit names itself "The Bulging Eyeballs of Gautama," and all of a sudden the Beatles become the contemplative converts of a particularly simple-minded swami who advertises in every London underground station.

One does not unearth the wisdom of the ages by shuffling about a few exotic catch phrases—nor does one learn anything about anybody's lore or religion by donning a few talismans and dosing on LSD. The most that comes of such superficial muddling is something like Timothy Leary's brand of easy-do syncretism—"somehow" all is

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one, and never mind precisely how. Fifty years ago when Swami Vivekananda first brought the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna to America he induced a gaggle of high-social dilettantes to say as much. The results were as ludicrous as they were ephemeral. Yet things are just beginning. In the present state of affairs, in the turgid flood tide of discovery, sampling and restive fascination, it would perhaps be too much to expect disciplined order —as surely it would be folly to try to deduce order from this happy chaos. The young have happened upon treasure trove long buried and are busy letting the quaint trinkets spill through their fingers.

Science as Superstition

Still, for all its frequently mindless vulgarity, for all its tendency to get lost in exotic clutter, a powerful and important force is at work in this wholesale willingness of the young to scrap their inherited culture's entrenched prejudice toward myth, religion and ritual. The life of Reason (with a capital R) has all too obviously failed to produce the agenda of civilized improvements the Voltaires and Jeffersons foresaw. Reason, materialism, the scientific world view have revealed themselves too often as simply a higher superstition, based on dubious but well-concealed assumptions about man and nature. Science, it has been said, thrives on sins of omission, and for 300 years those omissions have been piling up like the slag tips that surround Welsh mining towns: immense, precipitous mountains of frustrated aspiration and metaphysical yearning, which threaten to come cascading down in an impassioned landslide. It is impossible any longer to ignore the fact that our conception of intellect has been narrowed disastrously by the prevailing assumption, especially in the academies, that the life of the spirit is: (*1*) a lunatic fringe best left to artists and marginal visionaries; (*2*) a historical bone yard for antiquarian scholarship; (*3*) a highly specialized adjunct of professional anthropology. For along none of these approaches could the living power of myth, ritual and rite penetrate the intellectual establishment and have any existential (as opposed, at best, to merely academic) significance. As Lewis Mumford has suggested in his recent study, *The Myth of the Machine*:

> . . . the whole sphere of early man's existence which the modern scientific mind, in its consciousness of intellectual superiority, rejects, was the original source of man's self-transformation from an animal into a human person. Ritual, dance, totem, taboo, religion, magic—these provided the groundwork for man's later higher development.

This blind spot has made it possible, in the name of intellectual respectability, to ignore the obvious fact that not only early man but man through the ages has always devoted as much of his wit, care and energy to the creation of mythologies, ritual forms and world systems as to gathering the physical "necessities." And yet the standard stance of every "good" college teacher who is confronted with the task of breaking in a freshman class and introducing it to the life of the mind, is still that of the old village atheist, wielding a ruthless, positivistic skepticism.

The anti-religious prejudice of the intellectual establishment has severely crippled science and scholarship by fanatically ruling out whole areas of experience from systematic inquiry. If conventional scholarship touches those areas of life it is usually with the intention of compiling knowledge, not with the hope of salvaging value. And yet is was "science" in the highest sense of the word that brought William James to his study of religious experience, and Aldous Huxley to his experiments with the hallucinogenic drugs.

The Dark Side

Similarly, when Lewis Mumford insists—as he does in all his work—that historical studies must come to grips with the undeniable power of dream, myth and the sacred in human affairs, he is upholding the highest standards of scholarship. But when academics and intellectuals arrogantly truncate this greater conception of science and scholarship, they come up with that "middle-class secular humanism" of which Michael Novak has aptly said:

> It thinks of itself as humble in its agnosticism, and eschews the "mystic flights" of metaphysicians, theologians and dreamers; it is cautious and remote in dealing with heightened and passionate experiences that are the stuff of great literature and philosophy. It limits itself to this world and its concerns, concerns which fortunately turn out to be largely subject to precise formulations, and hence have a limited but comforting certainty.

I think we can anticipate that in the coming generation large numbers of students will begin to reject this reductive humanism, demanding a far deeper examination of that dark side of the human personality which has so long been written off as "mystical" by the dominant culture. It is because this renaissance of mythical-religious interest promises such enrichment of Western culture that one is led to despair when, as often happens, the young reduce it to an esoteric collection of peer-group symbols and slogans, vaguely wicked and ultimately trivial. Then instead of culture, we get collage; a miscellaneous heaping together, as if one had simply ransacked *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* and the *Celestia Arcana* for exotic tidbits. For example, the *International Times* of London prints a major article on Aleister Crowley, but the treatment goes no further than the sensational surface. It is a simple inversion of what too often dominates the underground press: the straight papers say "scandalous"; the underground says "marvelous"; but understanding gets no aid.

This is the point at which the young, who are offering, I feel, a great deal that is good to work with, need the help of mature minds, in order that distinctions can be drawn between the deep and the shallow, the superstitious and the wise. It is important to discern the underlying connection between the inspired seer on the one hand, and the side-show charlatan on the other, and to recognize that the skeptical, en bloc rejection of both has been a prime disaster. That much the young have seen. But between seer and charlatan there is also an all-important difference, and it is apparent only upon reflection. But who, among the alienated young, constantly on the lookout for the narks, has time for reflection?

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DEMOCRATIC SHAKE-UP

THE CALIFORNIA SURVIVAL KIT

PHIL KERBY

Anaheim, Calif.

The volunteer 30,000-member California Democratic Council (CDC), distrusted by the New Left as bourgeois liberal and feared by the right as a vanguard of socialism, is predominantly white, middle class and reformist in the tradition of Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt. But the shock waves reverberating through the nation from the war in Vietnam and the racial insurrection have shaken this essentially comfortable group of liberal activists. Over the weekend of March 16, the state-wide CDC convention proposed revolutionary changes in American political life.

The significance of the convention action was lost even by many of the delegates themselves in the wake of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy's sudden announcement that he would contest President Johnson for the Democratic nomination. The 757 delegates were at once repelled and fascinated by Kennedy's action. Buoyed by Senator McCarthy's dramatic showing in New Hampshire, they had gathered in Anaheim still not fully convinced that the Minnesotan could win at Chicago. They criticized Kennedy for the manner and timing of his announcement, but conceded his potential was greater than McCarthy's. Their anger was oddly mixed with the hope that Kennedy actually could mobilize enough political strength between now and the convention to force Johnson into retirement.

The night before Kennedy's announcement, CDC leaders quickly pushed through a pledge of "total support" to Senator McCarthy. That pledge will hold good for the hard-core CDC leadership group, but rank-and-file defection to Kennedy was quickly apparent. A sizable percentage of the membership may swing to Kennedy in the June 4 primary, when three delegations will be on the ballot: the CDC peace slate pledged to McCarthy, the Kennedy delegation now being formed and the dissension-riddled stand-in slate for Johnson headed by Atty. Gen. Thomas Lynch. Several state legislators on the pro-Johnson slate already have announced their intention of dropping out in favor of Kennedy, and other members of the delegation are likely to jump ship. Jesse M. Unruh, speaker of the State Assembly, and Kennedy's chief supporter in California, is trying to push through the legislature a law that would permit delegation members to switch allegiance. Under present law, delegates who resign may not join another slate.

CDC leaders, who tried frantically to persuade Kennedy not to enter the California primary, warned that he would split the peace forces and hand the state's convention votes to Johnson. But Unruh, who once served as John F. Kennedy's Southern California campaign chairman, believes that Kennedy can so divide the vote and still win the primary. He bases this belief on the assumption that Kennedy's campaign will reach far beyond the peace issue and bring into the primary hundreds of thousands of additional votes from labor and from the Negro and Mexican-American communities. Kennedy's appeal to these groups, excluding perhaps the black militants, is potent. "Senator Kennedy," Unruh said, "will clearly win, whether it's a two-cornered, three-cornered or five-cornered race."

Speaking to the convention by telephone from Indianapolis, Senator McCarthy said he had no intention of making any deals or concessions. "If I tried to deal them [his supporters] off, I'd have a revolution on my hands." CDC leaders are hoping that "some sort of accommodation" can be worked out between McCarthy and Kennedy before June 4. Nobody at Anaheim could know how that might be done. Rep. Philip Burton of California, a long-standing CDC favorite, flew to Anaheim from Washington to advise the delegates, in a tortured, convoluted speech, not to "eat one another up," advice that earned him the least applause he has ever received from the organization. Burton stopped just short of announcing for Kennedy.

Kennedy, McCarthy and the warring state Democrats will monopolize California headlines up to June 4 and perhaps beyond. The CDC endorsement for the United States Senate went to state Sen. Anthony G. Beilenson.

Interlandi, Los Angeles Times

"Why Not—All the Others Are Just as Ridiculous!"

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Alan Cranston, founding president of CDC but now at odds with the organization over the issue of Johnson's candidacy, will also enter the race; Mayor Sam Yorty of Los Angeles is or is not a candidate for the Senate, depending on which hour of which day he is interviewed.

It indicated the temper of the times that the war in Vietnam was the least controversial issue among a broad range of proposals adopted by the convention for submission to the Chicago convention platform committee. The convention called for an immediate end to the war in three steps: a halt to the bombing, negotiations which would include the National Liberation Front, and a phased withdrawal of American troops. That is a standard position that even Johnson would accept under certain conditions, but the CDC went further. Our foreign policy, it stated, has failed in the post-World War II years because "an exaggerated fear of communism . . . has produced a distorted view of the world and an oversimplified approach to its problems . . . . In a vain pursuit of 'absolute security,' we have involved ourselves in needless foreign intrigues and conflicts . . . and we have contributed to the danger of nuclear war."

The convention urged a series of foreign-policy changes: admission of Peking into the United Nations; an agreement between NATO and the Warsaw Pact nations for withdrawal of all foreign troops from Central Europe; recognition of East Germany and the Oder-Neisse frontier with Poland; international guarantees by the great powers for the security of Israel and the Arab states in the Middle East, with an embargo of arms sales to both sides.

The CDC issued a routine call for an end to poverty in America and the junking of our "inadequate and ancient public assistance program that embitters millions of Americans whom it is intended to serve." To accomplish this, the convention advocated an income floor of $3,000 to $4,000 for every family, a goal which the delegates said is easily made possible by advanced technology.

The adventurous temper of the convention was then reflected in a proposal for the federal government to take over the production of military hardware, "thereby eliminating private profit as a factor in military procurement." In a statement on "public ownership" the convention said: "One of the most persistent special-interest lobbying efforts in American politics has been to equate any form of public ownership with alien social and economic doctrine. As a result, a vast amount of public money and public assistance has been poured into virtually every phase of our national economy with little or no return to the American people. This form of subsidizing private profits with public funds should be thoroughly reviewed with the aim of nationalizing those areas of the economy where the public interest could be better served by public in place of private ownership, such as the railroads and utilities."

As though that were not enough, the delegates proposed tax reforms which would: treat capital gains and income from bonds and dividends like other income for tax purposes; use taxes to discourage urban land speculation; eliminate sales taxes on necessities; shift the cost of education and welfare to the federal treasury to lower the burden on home owners, and levy all taxes on the basis of ability to pay.

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Racism, as the convention views it, is essentially economic discrimination. The delegates proposed: creation of jobs at adequate wages for the unemployed; vocational training financed by federal funds; construction of metropolitan school areas designed to meet the special needs of students from minority groups; rehabilitation of the black ghettos and other blighted housing areas; and low-cost urban transportation. (Lack of transportation prevents many Negroes trapped in ghettos like the Watts area of Los Angeles from reaching available jobs.)

The CDC said the quality of education offered in the black and Mexican-American communities is a "national scandal," which is "largely due to the cultural chasm between the educational structure and the students." The convention, composed largely of middle- and upper-class professionals and held in the depressingly luxurious Anaheim convention center (adjacent to Disneyland) asked: "How can the poverty-ridden and often hungry child relate to the well-fed, comfortable middle-class teacher who follows a curriculum dictated by middle-class values?"

National dissent against the war and mass protests against racial discrimination have produced the first signs of a reaction which caused the CDC to warn: "The kangaroo-court methods of governmental investigative agencies, the subversion of organizations by the CIA, the FBI assumption of political-police power have spread rapidly to local and state enforcement agencies. The politicalization of the police, supported by anti-democratic statements from high military personnel, is rapidly leading toward the use of new instruments of physical intimidation that go far beyond the limits of reasonable standards of law enforcement." To restore and guarantee the right of dissent and protest, the CDC, as it has done before, proposed the abolition of the House Committee on Un-American Activitites. The delegates advocated gun-control laws, stricter laws against wire tapping and declared their opposition to all forms of censorship, cultural and political.

As a vehicle of practical politics, these proposals are highly impractical. Acknowledging this fact, one CDC official explained: "They were not tailored to practical politics but are intended as a realistic assessment of what has to be done to enable this nation to meet its problems and survive." Dr. Martin Luther King, who understands the use of practical politics as well as anyone, refrained at Anaheim from endorsing either one "of these fine men"—Kennedy and McCarthy—but asked for the defeat of Johnson. That is no panacea for the country's present ills, but it is probably the essential first step for recovery.

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

Wolfe Among the Monstres Sacres

THOMAS WOLFE. *By Andrew Turnbull. Charles Scribner's Sons. 374 pp. $7.95.*

MINA CURTISS
Mrs. Curtiss is the author of Bizet and His World *(Knopf), and the translator and editor of* My Friend Degas *by Daniel Halevy (Wesleyan) and* Letters of Marcel Proust *(Vintage).*

To someone who knew Tom Wolfe and Aline Bernstein well, the impulse behind this biography is puzzling. What drove the author to work his way through masses of unpublished and often redundant material, to spend his time interviewing 700 people, in order to recount again this oft-told tale? For surely, apart from Proust and Joyce, *monstres sacrés,* a category in which Tom and the admirers of his work thought he belonged (all nine volumes of Proust in the Modern Library edition run to 4266 pages, the first edition of *Ulysses* has 732 pages, Wolfe's four major novels add up to 3012 pages), no writer's life in this century has been more fully documented. His autobiographical novels are literally and chronologically true. Seven hundred and seventy pages of his letters have been published as well as his agent's biography of him, and an account of their relationship by Aline Bernstein, whom Mr. Turnbull describes as one of "the twin engines that got Wolfe's heavy plane off the ground." There are also personal interviews, articles and books by members of his family and by friends. Why, then, did Mr. Turnbull feel impelled to add to this mass of material another biographical study of a writer who describes himself as an "unhappy monster who can do nothing else but write [and] never come to the end of what he is writing"?

The reason is not because he fell in love with Wolfe's work. I remember when he came to interview me I mentioned to him the contrast in tone between the description of an incident in one of the books and the letter Tom had written me the day after it actually happened. Mr. Turnbull said that he had not yet reread the books because he wanted first to talk to all the people who had known Tom. And in his note on Sources he admits not having read *Look Homeward, Angel* until he started the biography. It is not then his own reading of Wolfe's work that caused him to accept as the hypothesis of his biography Tom's early statement: ". . . by God, I have genius . . . and I shall force the inescapable fact down the throats of the rats and vermin who want the proof."

But it was not rats and vermin, however much he may have treated them as such, but a brilliant, devoted editor and a loving, dedicated mistress, who enabled him to transform his dysenteric stream of verbose self-expression into a meaningful and communicable novel form. His gigantic presence, his animal magnetism, the dynamism and massiveness of his personality, both actual and as it translated itself into his work, made him a legend in his lifetime and for a decade or more thereafter. It is this legend which seems to have seduced Mr. Turnbull and deprived him of the detachment necessary for a truthful account of the life of a monster, the kind of detachment that Henri Troyat managed to preserve in his biography of that greatest of all modern *monstres sacrés,* the author of *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina.* One never ceases being appalled by Tolstoy's behavior. But one goes back and reads those two books, loses oneself in a world that seems truer than life itself, and marvels at the complexity, the inconsistency, the near madness of genius. Of the genius there is never any doubt.

Mr. Turnbull's biography sent me back to Wolfe's books. Forty years ago I read *Look Homeward, Angel* and was deeply moved by the description of his brother's death and its aftermath. Again I find it moving, one of the few passages in his work where Tom's permeating self-pity is quite absent. Of his second book *Of Time and the River,* I must honestly admit that, at the time of publication, I read only the last few pages where there is a brief description of me which, as I reread it, seems to be rather in the style of Marie Corelli or Ouida. I have made some effort to read the rest of the book, but it is a *roman à clef* to which I lack the keys. As a result the characters seem at best two-dimensional, and the narrative is interrupted by purple patches of the hero's self-indulgent moaning and groaning:

> . . . In his heart a dogged and furious resentment was beginning to glow and moulder—a savage hate of hate, a fear of fear, a murderous intensity of desire to strangle the shapes of death and barrenness—a resistance still passive, but growing in bitterness and pugnacity with every passing day, as he saw how uselessly and horribly men allowed themselves to be duped, cheated and beaten by the living rat and by the fraud of fear, and that was being strengthened momently [*sic*] now by an implacable conviction, a dogged and incontrovertible memory that, incredibly sharpened by his fury and desire, awoke and netted out of the sea-depths of the past, the shining fish of a million living moments.

Six pages of this hyperbole form an introduction to a passage about his teaching at New York University, a class made up, he writes, "of thirty or forty Jews and Jewesses, all laughing, shouting, screaming, thick with their hot and swarthy body-smells, their strong female odors of rut and crotch and arm-pit and cheap perfume, and their hard male smells that were rancid, stale, and sour. . . . He spoke to them out of the lips of Herrick, Donne and Shakespeare, of all the things that never change, of all the things that would abide forever," implying, it would seem, that in the good old days of Queen Elizabeth and James I, poets and clergymen, if not the *hoi polloi,* smelled like roses.

In the last two novels, *The Web and the Rock* and *You Can't Go Home Again,* Wolfe changed his pseudonym from Eugene Gant to George Webber, but the chronology in the telling of his life story remains unchanged. When *The Web and the Rock* was first published, I read the portions that concerned people I knew. Then I was merely shocked by the exhausting, repetitious account of his and Aline Bernstein's love-hate affair. On rereading parts of it now I can see that his portrayal of Aline's attitude toward her work, her mannerisms, her speech, and even the eat-your-cake-and-have-it-too side of her character, which she was the first to admit, are accurate. But of the particular quality of warmth and empathy for which her non-infatuated friends loved her there is little hint. The satirical portraits of such then well-known writers as Alexander Woollcott and Carl Van Vechten are easily recognizable and show a certain Pickwickian gift. However, when I explored some pages I had not previously read, I was ap-

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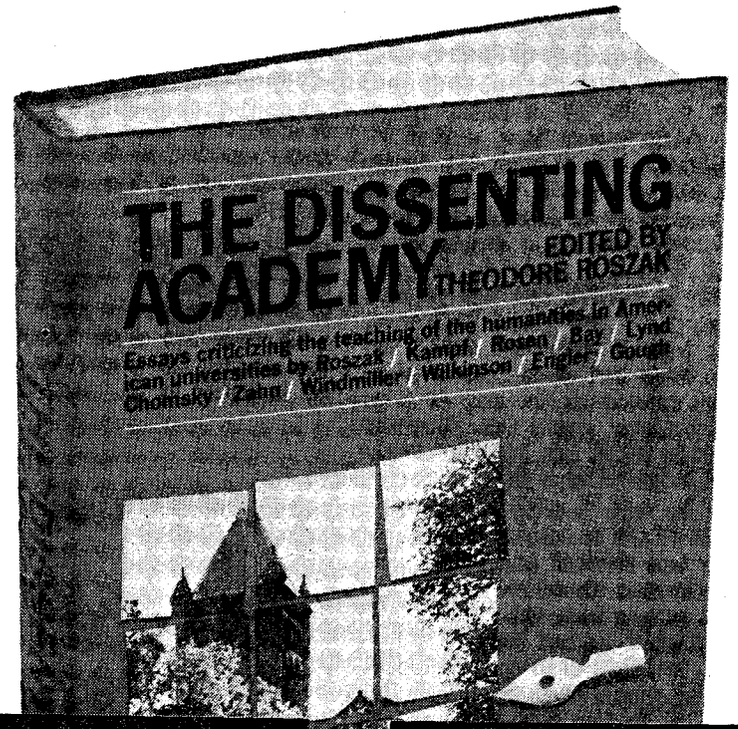
palled by a vulgarity that had never appeared in the volumes edited by Maxwell Perkins.

The hero is indulging in a fantasy of the kind of love affair he would like to have. and here is how he imagines the Park Avenue lady of his dreams with whom he dines in her elegant apartment. "In unadorned but costly evening dress, of heavy, pearl-colored silk, with silver hose, and black, jewelled slippers, she would reveal an unsuspected maturity, depth of breast and fullness of limb. . . . Later in the evening, they would sit before the fire, he in a deep upholstered chair, she on a chaise-longue, where they would have small cups of black coffee, a glass of green Chartreuse, or of Grand Marnier. He would smoke fragrant, toasted, loose-drawing Lucky Strikes; she would smoke Melachrinos. From time to time she would move her limbs slightly, and her silken calves, sliding gently apart or together, would cause an audible and voluptuous friction." Because this passage evoked for me the advertisements in *The New Yorker*, I looked at the end of the chapter to make sure that it was not intentionally satirical. It is not. "He would wear her love like a most invulnerable target over his heart. She would be the heart of his desire, the well of his passion."

The hero's susceptibility to this phantom, blonde, gentile lady contrasts strikingly with his subsequent remarks about "those fine Jewish ladies on Park Avenue with their million dollar soul yearnings and their fancy fornications . . . the simple pleasures of the Jewish millionaires and the innocent adulteries of their wives," which he shouts at his Jewish mistress in one of the quarrels.

From the few excerpts I have quoted in this review it is clear that a biographer would have to face the problem of Tom's anti-Semitism. The way Mr. Turnbull treats this subject seems to me to show one of the dangers of basing a writer's biography on his day-to-day life rather than on his work. "The anti-Semitism evident in Wolfe's treatment of Aline cannot be blinked but must be qualified," Mr. Turnbull says: ". . . If Wolfe was anti-Semitic he was also at times anti-German, anti-French, anti-Irish, and even anti-American." Yet in Germany in 1936 Wolfe wrote in his notes: "I don't like Jews and if most of the people I know would tell the truth about their feelings, I wonder how many of them would be able to say that they liked Jews." In spite of this statement, Mr. Turnbull bolsters his defense with at least two of the clichés that always make Jews laugh. A Jewish girl with whom Tom had a brief

Anti-Textbook*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affair says that he was not "deeply anti-Semitic," not deeply enough, obviously, to keep him from making an exception of her. And Maxwell Perkins, that most intelligent of Wasps, who even after Tom's betrayal of him continued to regard him as a combined "archangel and rascal," said that Tom had "no anti-Semitic leanings," indeed some of his best friends were Jews.

The prejudices of an author are of no importance as long as they do not diminish his gifts as an artist. Henry Adams would never have denied his anti-Semitism, but not until his letters were published would a reader of *The Education* or of *Mont-Saint-Michel* and *Chartres* have been aware of it. However, over and above the repeated references in Wolfe's last two volumes to "great, proud and potent beak-nosed Jews . . . great beak-nosed Jews filled with insolence and scorn," there is an important episode at the end of *You Can't Go Home Again* that illustrates the extent to which this prejudice weakened his judgment as a writer.

When he was leaving Germany in 1936, one of the passengers in his compartment was arrested and held at the border. The man turned out to be a Jew trying to escape from the country. "As the car in which he had been riding slid by, he . . . looked once, directly and steadfastly, at his former companions, and they at him. And in that gaze there was all the unmeasured weight of man's mortal anguish. George and the others felt somehow naked and ashamed, and somehow guilty. They all felt they were saying farewell, not to a man, but to humanity; not to some pathetic stranger, some chance acquaintance, but to mankind; not to some nameless cipher out of life, but to the fading image of a brother's face. The train swept out and gathered speed—and so they lost him."

That paragraph is a perfect ending for this section of the book—intensely felt, yet objective and controlled. But this simple statement of shared experience is not enough. It is followed by the purplest of patches, the dirge for Tom's own personal loss of his beloved Germany. "It was the other part of his heart's home, a haunted park of dark desire, a magic domain of fulfillment. It was the dark, lost Helen that had been forever burning in his blood—the dark lost Helen he had found.

"And now it was the dark, found Helen he had lost. . . . Ended now for him, with the sharp and clean finality of the closing of a door, was the time when his dark roots, like those of a pot-bound plant, could be left to feed upon their own substance and nourish their own little self-absorbed designs." And so on and so on.

After his return to America, following the episode in the train, Wolfe was outraged by a reporter's version of a newspaper interview he had given. "I wonder," he wrote to Hamilton Basso, "just how much longer we've got to sit by meekly and submissively while the scavengers, the shysters, the traducers and filth-purveyors of every sort are allowed to go their way unchecked. It almost makes me long for dear old Adolf and his S.S. men. They at least could put a stop to a good many of our own accepted forms of thugdom. Of course, in doing so they would establish another and much more powerful one of their own, and there's the rub."

The last thing I ever heard Tom say he shouted at Aline Bernstein in one of their last quarrels: "Hitler knows what to do with people like you."

Geniuses are never "nice" men, and the greater the genius the less "nice" he is likely to be. But their masterpieces live after them, and after they are dead their very monstrosity can become a gauge of their achievement. As a prejudiced critic, I am clearly incapable of judging whether Wolfe's books are sufficiently enduring to warrant this additional personal history. But there is one page in this biography, more or less hidden away in the notes, that I find fascinating. It reproduces a portion of the original manuscript of *Look Homeward, Angel,* with Max Perkins' corrections, or rather deletions.

Mr. Turnbull, after the publication of his excellent life of Scott Fitzgerald, edited a volume of Fitzgerald's letters. One would like to think that he might follow this devoted biography of Wolfe with a volume of excerpts from his manuscripts, collated with the editorial changes. Such an undertaking might not settle the question of Wolfe's genius but it would be an illuminating study, very useful to students and teachers of so-called creative writing.

Versions of Rural America

A GARDEN OF EARTHLY DELIGHTS. *By Joyce Carol Oates. Vanguard Press. 440 pp. $5.95.*

A PLACE ON EARTH. *By Wendell Berry. Harcourt, Brace & World. 550 pp. $7.50.*

RICHARD CLARK STERNE
Mr. Sterne is associate professor of English at Simmons College.

These two authors respond very differently to the sinister dreariness of a Muzak-and-murder society, in which we all tend to the condition of displaced persons. While Miss Oates's characters, whether migrant farm workers or men of property, move and have their restless being in a kind of torture garden that we see as through shattered glass, Mr. Berry's rural figures live an essentially ordered life, in whose course not only birth and familial love but the pain of grief over death by flood and in war imply the author's rejection of "absurdity" as the inevitable human condition. *A Garden of Earthly Delights* is a mechanized domain of witches who sometimes transform the despised poor into the despising rich; *A Place on Earth* is a Virgilian landscape, painted to suggest what a sane life might be.

Miss Oates's novel, its title borrowed from Hieronymus Bosch, focuses disturbingly on three generations of an American family—from unlettered, indebted and openly violent migrant laborer to literate, power-fearing, power-loving landowner. Carleton Walpole, the first member of the family we meet, carries with him as he travels with his wife and children from Arkansas to South Carolina to New Jersey to Florida in the late 1920s and early 1930s, a yearning memory of his Kentucky home and land. Dying of cancer while futilely searching for a daughter who has run off with a man, he feels he must go on living because his death would be the death of his memories:

> It terrified him that people and places and dates should fly off into nothing . . . belonging to no one and making no sense—who else could know what that photograph meant . . . and who else could remember his father's face, who else could remember the mistake he'd made with Rafe that time, ending up with Rafe dead and for what reason? . . .

His runaway daughter, Clara, knows only that she wants "somethin'." Her home has been one migrant labor camp after another; she has been called "white trash" by a schoolteacher, and Carleton has taken a mistress—after his wife's death—who is almost as young as she. The young vagabond to whom Clara succumbs, after being struck by his resemblance to her father, acts almost paternally toward her. He makes her wash herself, and teaches her to read—at the level of romance magazines. But he is restlessly violent and suddenly takes off for Mexico, leaving her pregnant, in a Southwestern town called Tintern.

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THE DOMINICAN REVOLT

by THEODORE DRAPER

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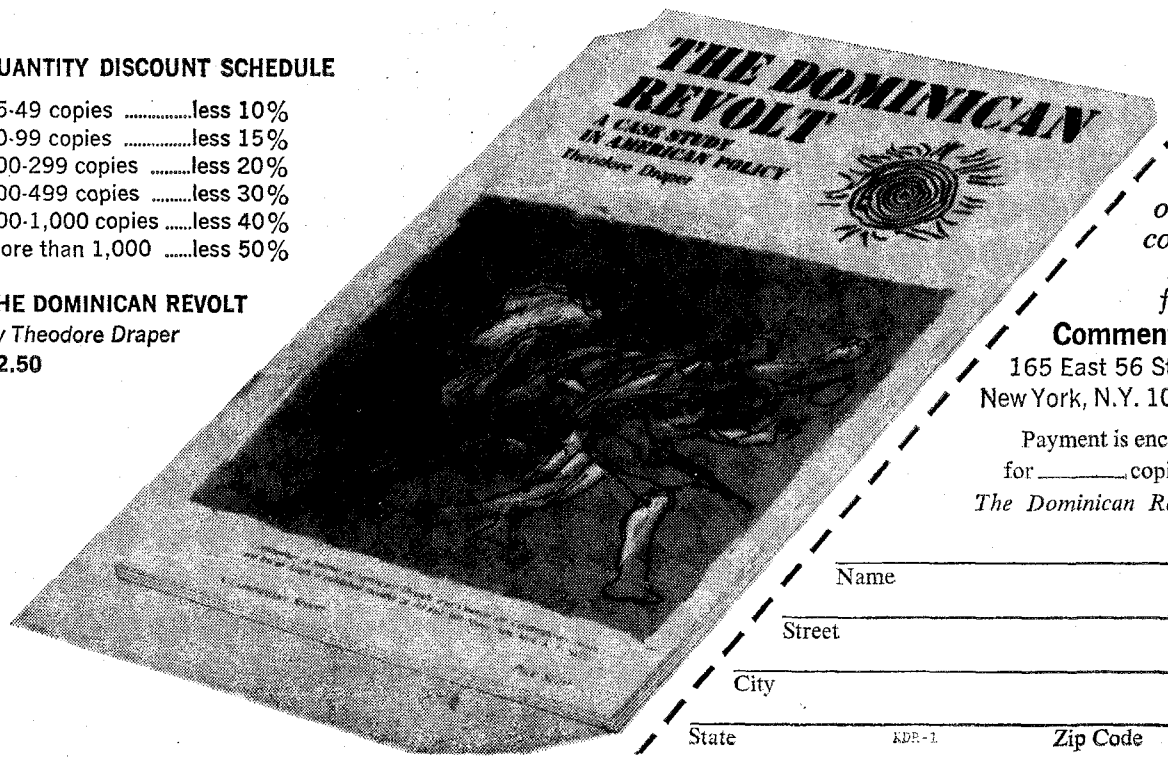

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With no Wordsworthian remembrances to help her see "into the life of things," Clara becomes the mistress of a wealthy, sanctimonious married man—Revere. This somber personage sets her up with a car and a house, believes the child she gives birth to is his own, and marries her seven years later, after his own wife's death.

Clara calls her child "Swan," although his legal name is Steven, because swans "look real cold, they're not afraid of anything." Significantly, she has thought of "Clara" (the name of one of her father's sisters) as having "nothing to do with her at all." And "Swan" proves to be shrinkingly apprehensive rather than intrepid. Thus, in the course of three generations, from Carleton Walpole who vividly recalls his father, to Clara who has mixed feelings toward hers, to the illegitimate "Swan" who comes only to suspect who his real father is, names become increasingly dissociated from the persons who bear them.

Coincident with this incremental dissociation is a growing preoccupation with power and status. Carleton took pride in his own physical strength and his superiority to "Niggers" and "Mexes"; Clara becomes intensely possessive of her house and garden (as a little girl she had stolen an American flag from the porch of a middle-class house), admires strength wherever she finds it, and is contemptuous of her son's timidity. "Swan" early in life sees power as the deepest reality in human relationships, and because of his inability to reconcile his fear of having it with his drive to possess it, he goes mad. In his childhood he has been, and felt, responsible in an ambiguous way for the accidental death by shooting of one of his three foster brothers. In his early 20s, torn between his "strange mystical love" for the Revere land of which he has become a kind of steward, and his desire to "destroy everything," he kills the foster father who incarnates power, then kills himself.

At the end of Miss Oates's impressive *lumpen-Buddenbrooks*, the middle-aged Clara has moved to a nursing home, where she is visited frequently and "for the rest of Clara's life" by her oldest foster son, whom she had once encouraged to try to make love to her, and then rejected. She does virtually nothing except watch television:

> She seemed to like best programs that showed men fighting, swinging from ropes, shooting guns and driving fast cars, killing the enemy again and again until the dying gasps of evil men were only a certain familiar rhythm away from the opening blasts of the commercials, which changed only gradually over the years.

There are flaws in the novel. The last third of it, dealing chiefly with "Swan" and Revere, seems diffuse, less carefully worked out than the superbly controlled first part about Carleton, or the complex, vivid second part which focuses on Clara. The symbolism is sometimes too blatant, as when the saturnine Revere makes love to Clara—who is thinking of her lost young lover—in a parlor, their bodies surrounded by "drifting bunches of dust and the corpses of insects and odd pieces of furniture hunched beneath soiled sheets." But this book, which is reminiscent of at least one of Miss Oates's short stories, "First Views of the Enemy," is not only distinctly better than her first novel, *With Shuddering Fall*, but constitutes as penetrating an examination of our American sickness as the best work of Dreiser, Fitzgerald or Faulkner.

A Place on Earth is less familiar ground. Wendell Berry has written not a novel but a long georgic and elegiac poem in the form of a prose narrative. Essentially, he is attempting to affirm the secular sacredness of life by creating an atmosphere of grief, a weather of pain. He could have used as epigraph a line from one of his own poems, "Canticle for Robert Hazel": "A creed and a grave never did equal the life/of anything."

The setting (like that of *Nathan Coulter*, Berry's first novel), is Kentucky tobacco country shortly before and shortly after the end of World War II. Mat Feltner, a farmer in his early 60s, learns at the rainy beginning of March, 1945, that his only son, Virgil, is missing in action. A tense quietness falls upon him, his wife Margaret, and their pregnant daughter-in-law, Hannah. The months that follow are a hopeless-hopeful waiting, until one day in June Mat breaks the spell in which they have been living:

> Virgil is dead. He's not going to come back. He's dead, Margaret. Hannah, he's dead. Say so. We'll kill ourselves trying to pretend anything else.

Berry's concern throughout the book with the individuality of every person, and his irreplaceability in the minds of those who love him, is balanced by his evocation of a natural order—always threatened by chaos—of which each person is a part. The war that destroys Virgil and his neighbor Tom Coulter, the flood that takes the life of little Annie Crop, the lonely despair that drives the lame carpenter Ernest Finley—wounded in World War I—to suicide, are chaotic eruptions, as are the hideous events of which the radio and newspapers mechanically inform villagers and farmers: the camps discovered by our armies in Europe; the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. It seems to Mat, when he hears of the destruction of the Japanese city,

> that the years of violence have at last arrived at what, without his knowing it, they had been headed for, not by any human reason or motive or wish but by the logic of violence itself.

More than ever before, the relatively communal, unacquisitive life embodied in Mat's easy relationship with his tenants, and in his care for and pleasure in orchard and garden, newborn granddaughter and newborn lamb, seems menaced by the world's madness.

SNOW LODGE

The door is open
Winter
I send back
This word
Winter
Shape
Sounding
A man's voice
Going where it goes.

I have said you
Winter
And lived
And my heart is
The same
As anyone's heart
But let winter in
And said it.

The snow in my palm
Melts
And can be drunk.

LEONARD NATHAN

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The special music of *A Place on Earth* has stayed in my mind. But this pastoral is almost intolerably slow moving, and is basically too sentimental for my taste. While Wendell Berry knows and shows that there have been violence and unbearable unhappiness in rural Kentucky, he is too intent on evoking a way of life antithetical to that of anxious self-seeking and compulsive destruction. I liked the quirks and ribald eccentricities of such well-drawn characters as Jayber Crow, Old Jack, Big Ellis and Whacker Spradlin. But I wish there were one country feller hungry for power, and sufficiently clever to win high public office, and to astonish and frighten the home town with his acts.

Man With a Marvy Lymph System

COCKSURE. *By Mordecai Richler. Simon & Schuster. 250 pp. $4.95.*

ROBERT HATCH

I was about to call *Cocksure* derivative, but the word is insufficient for the book's voracity. There are in it patches of *Candy*, *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan*, *Lucky Jim*, the short stories of Saki, *Goldfinger*, and I have no idea what other fiction that Mordecai Richler has read and I have not. The book feels like a syllabus of satiric observations from about the period of World War I to the present.

There are two reasons, though, why this acquisitiveness should not be held a fault (that it may put some readers off is another matter). In the first place, it seems to be entirely deliberate. Richler is writing Pop fiction, and Pop is a style that draws, not from life but from the warehouse—its point is that it is second-hand. Beyond that, I think Richler is not much interested in creating plot and character—at least, he shows no sign of any such design. He has made his reputation over the past few years as a social critic of impressive acuity and singular good nature, and though he turns from time to time to fiction I would judge from *Cocksure* (I have not read his other novels) that he does not change the direction of his interest. He is in a hurry to document some of the more aberrant tendencies of our present and can work faster with prefabricated materials.

Like many of its sources, *Cocksure* is often a very funny book; it is also, being the most recent, more obscene than any of them. Indeed, it is so wildly indecent in spots that I should find it awkward here to indicate even the nature of the encounters described. For all that, the book is less erotic than *Mansfield Park*, and I take it to be one of Richler's principal charges that, from excess of permissiveness, clinical mindedness and a generally indiscriminate experimental nuzzling, the age has lost its sexiness. It isn't the most persuasive section of the book (though at moments absurdly hilarious), and a degree of stridency makes me think that the author knows it.

The two other matters that principally engage *Cocksure* are the scrupulosities of the liberal ethic and the parasitic basis of large entrepreneurial activity. The hero of the first of these is Mortimer Griffin, editor for a small London publisher, whose Wasp superego is in pawn to the victims of prejudice. Disaster strikes Mortimer when, after a lecture he has given, one of his auditors comes forward to congratulate him as a fellow Jew. Griffin modestly denies the relationship, eliciting the predictable, "What are you so afraid of?" His attempts to extricate himself, with dignity and generosity toward all, from the charge of denying a birthright that in fact is not his, loses him the intimate attentions of his wife and the friendship of a fellow editor (a diminutive and one-man London Irgun) and shortly he finds himself the symbol of rabid anti-Semitism in the whole humane community. Similarly, Griffin's care to avoid any suggestion of a patronizing gesture in an encounter with a handsome young Negro woman earns him the maternal epithet that black power seems to have made peculiarly its own.

What Mortimer cannot recognize is a degree of malice lurking in the lesser breeds he is so eager to embrace. He goes blundering through the racial undergrowth, crying "friend, friend," and never sees a guerrilla until he has been zapped.

The other protagonist is a pseudonymous Greek known as Star Maker, who owns all of Hollywood and is steadily buying control of the world's communications industries. But power seems to be less the preoccupation of this enigmatic and curiously asymmetrical figure (his arms and legs are poor matches) than is the quest for immortality; and it

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soon becomes evident that he exploits his enormous staff in a shockingly direct way. His absorption of enterprises seems motivated primarily by a quest for ebulliently healthy potential donors, whom he binds to him financially and by the cannibalistic sentimentality that pervades really big business. A man very much of his times, Richler earns the good luck of his topicality. The recent heart transplant publicity has raised ghoulish speculations in precisely the area of Star Maker's solicitude for the organic welfare of his junior associates.

There are also several sub-themes, my favorite being that of Polly Morgan, a girl so drenched in the screen "medium" that her life, cinema style, tends to "cut" rather than to flow. Thus a guest, caught in her time pattern, may find himself blipped from the promise of cocktails to a stack of empty dishes suggesting a recently completed feast; and later in the evening he may be unnerved by an abrupt transition from shy approaches to the sight of his hostess lying in bed, mussed and replete, and murmuring: "It was super for me, darling; was it super for you?"

The main themes and the subsidiaries are efficiently threaded together. Mortimer's son attends the Beatrice Webb school, scene of some of the more outlandish pornographic exploits, and he has attracted Star Maker's favorable attention because of what the old man calls his "marvy lymph system." He has also spent a night with Polly, hoping for some respite from the wars of social justice, but gaining little refreshment from the ellipses of her reality.

It is indeed a marvy book, an easy night's reading of riotous social terrorism designed to provide inoculation against the madness now seeping down the air shafts of all our bomb shelters.

A Fearful & Mindless Violence

A HALL OF MIRRORS. *By Robert Stone. Houghton Mifflin. 409 pp. $5.95.*

DAVID THORBURN
Mr. Thorburn teaches English at Yale University.

This remarkable first novel was one of the best works of fiction published last year. It received a good deal of attention in the daily press, but there is more to be said about it, primarily because it confronts with unique directness the fearful and mindless violence in which America is presently immersed.

In bare outline *A Hall of Mirrors* resembles dozens of similar books whose estimate of our circumstances is bleak and even despairing, whose central characters are maimed victims and sufferers, whose modern urban setting, as the blurb (rather nicely!) puts it, "is that rootless one of the all-night tenth-run movie, the mission house lunch, the corner where everyone has to move on, buddy." But this novel is distinguished from the conventional *roman de malaise* as gold from dross.

Where in other superficially similar novels the despair seems forced or modish, in this one it is earned. Where other writers have been content with the abstract idea of the passive or suffering hero, Stone gives us characters whose weaknesses and deformities are projected with extraordinary and persuasive energy. Where in less successful novels the menace and violence and sordidness of the city are either indifferently rendered or are presented in descriptive set pieces—self-serving interludes really, which deflect our attention from the life of the characters or the thrust of the plot—in *A Hall of Mirrors* the urban setting is evoked with a brilliant sensory concreteness that is palpably true, and is also resonant of the psychic and moral anxieties which press upon the characters.

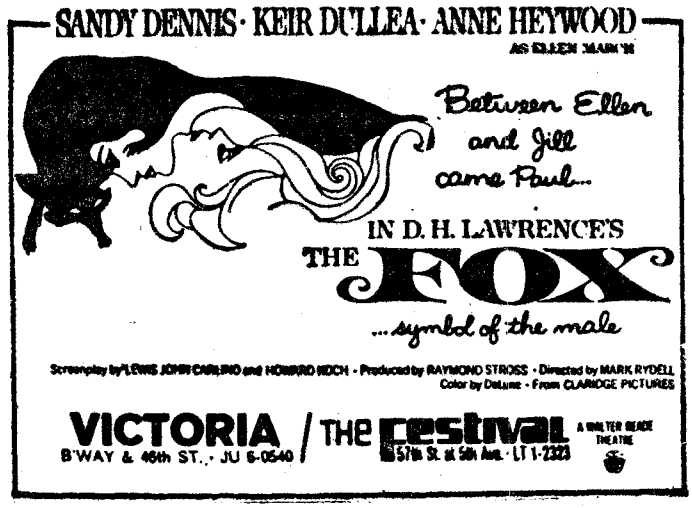
The novel's central character is Rheinhardt—we never learn his first name—an alcoholic, sometime classical musician of great but unfulfilled promise, who drifts into New Orleans as the book opens. Relying on his con man's gift for talk he eventually gets a job as an announcer on a right-wing radio station whose racist message furthers the sinister political ambitions of its millionaire owner.

Drenched in self-loathing and assaulted by alcoholic nightmares, Rheinhardt quiets his conscience by turning on in the marijuana-smoking world of some near-beatnik types who live in his apartment house, and by wearily making love to a tough, unlucky bar girl whose desperate circumstances mirror Rheinhardt's own. Rheinhardt's nightmares are brilliantly described and prefigure the real nightmare of violence and brutal madness at the political rally turned race riot with which the novel concludes:

> The last dream went on in some littered darkness, a dim loft-like place—he was pressed into a glass booth the size of a coffin from which he could see a floor of worn wooden planks that was strewn with burned charcoal and wrapping paper. There were piles of coal and heaps of green sticks, rusted nails upright—and stretching into the darkness, rows of dusty glass display cases where shapeless artifacts lay covered with mold. . . . He kept trying to rise on his toes to test the top of the booth, but it was always higher than his head; he sank down, bending his knees to look at the planks of the floor and saw small bright-eyed animals with furred parabolic ears rising from their heads, who came forward in darts and rushes to peer in at him and press bared teeth and quivering nostrils against the glass walls. Cavies, he thought, they were called cavies.

The essential qualities of this passage—its eerie vividness, its fine desperate intensity—are characteristic of the whole novel; and the nightmare fear of entrapment and savage attack which is projected here is the book's defining metaphor. If Rheinhardt is imprisoned from within, his girl Geraldine moves in the novel through a series of small enclosed places, tiny bedrooms, the dirty washroom of a bar to which she retreats from a threatening lover, finally to the inhuman steel closeness of the jail cell in which she hangs herself.

> The cold damp links chilled the back of her neck, pressed at her throat.
> I'm there.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Geraldine closed her eyes, took a breath, and kicked her bunk up against the wall; above her head the slack chain played out with a terrible sound, went taut, held. She stiffened with the shock; her fingers stretched in fear and pain over a dangling hem of cloth blanket beside her body.

Mistake, mistake, she thought. Nobody could want this. But she knew there was no mistake. It was very familiar.

At its core, this book is about the disease of violence which it takes to be the essential condition of American life. It sees that this violence is ubiquitous and inescapable, and that, like all true evil, it has a complex character. It has, for example, its bizarre, half-comic side:

Woody was holding her arm and talking slow—making the speech about the gun and how—talking real slow—he was gonna take that little old gun and stick the ever lovin' barrel right smack up against the top of her mouth and when he pulled the trigger her brains were going to smear the ceiling and so forth. It was one of his favorite lyric recitations and Geraldine always found it a little fascinating to hear.

It has, even, an aspect of gaiety:

The razors were [displayed] in concentric circles, or rather in a wide dazzling spiral that carried the eye graciously from one degree of craftsmanship to the next. Those on the perimeter were . . . modest . . . a man might conceivably use them to shave with. In the next circle, they were smaller, but much prettier. . . . In the deepest circles, the razors were altogether festive, merry with carnival colors, brilliant in riotous plastic—some had wooden finger grips for when the palm sweated; the cutting edges of the blades had a happy sparkle and looked wonderfully precise.

And it possesses also, at times, a sinister gentleness:

"You'll be all right, little one," the man said. She looked up at him then. He looked wise and kind. . . .

"Go ahead, little one." He kept holding the brass knuckles to her mouth; she could taste the sour brass afterward in dreams. "Move out."

He had the gentlest voice she could ever remember hearing.

Unpretentiously, and without resort to fable, this novel tells us that we are drowning in the inhuman and the violent; it confronts us with precisely those visions which paralyze one of its characters: "If he looked back, he thought, there might appear against the awful clarity of that evening some dreadful procession of things as they are. . . ." It is not a perfect book. One feels in particular that its plot is somewhat contrived and that one of its central characters is less credible than the others. But these flaws barely affect the novel's power, its seriousness, its impressive authority as a kind of inspired *report*. It gives us things as they are, and with a lyrical evenness in which there is not a trace of surprise or even outrage.

This is what is most disturbing about the book. Stone's recognition of the violence and malignity which oppress his characters has about it something casual, something taken for granted. None of this is unusual or unexpected, the novel, in its pain, tells us; this is just the way things are.

And, more, unlike Mailer's heavy-handed allegory of brutality, *Why Are We In Vietnam?*, and unlike Styron's *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (where the violence is distanced as history), Stone's novel will not allow us to regard it as a metaphor; we are not protected from its insights by the comforts of analogy. In this book the people who feel compassion or human affection are pursued relentlessly. They are caught and destroyed. The places of power and authority are held by malignant and insane men. These men are the victors.

In its earned hopelessness, *A Hall of Mirrors* sees, and dramatizes with terrible conviction, a truth which has afflicted men at all times but which presses upon us in this moment with particular intensity: that we are all prisoners, our humanity imperiled, and in the grip of monsters.

Thumb-Sucking

THEE: A Poem. *By Conrad Aiken. Drawings by Leonard Baskin. George Braziller. 14 pp. $5.*

RICHARD EBERHART

Mr. Eberhart, who teaches at Dartmouth, won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1966. His most recent book is Thirty One Sonnets *(The Eakins Press). A new book of poems,* Shifts of Being, *will be published this year by Oxford University Press.*

Thee is a new short long poem, or a long short poem, of 8 unnumbered pages, published with six page-drawings by Leonard Baskin.

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poem. The ideas are extremely simple. It is a simple-minded poem, really a song not a prayer.

If it is a prayer the cleverness of Aiken is to use a word usually used to praise God or Christ, at least in Christianity, without going that far. He refuses outright religious commitment, deviating into aestheticism where he has always dwelled. The poem idea, then, is schizothymic. It is modern in this sense. The THEE, then, is not God or Christ, to whom he does or does not pray, but if he does not pray, he celebrates. He celebrates everything—life and death, doubt, the spirit, "what fatal question" of the THEE, the ultimate eyes, breath and identity as prime terms thrown on the page.

He celebrates the mysteries of being. He does mention God once, as follows:

Self-praise were then our praise of
THEE
unless we say divinity
cries in us both as we draw breath
cry death cry death
and all our hate
we must abate
and THEE *must with us meet and mate*
give birth give suck be sick and die
and close the All-God-Giving-Eye
for the last time to sky.

The mystery of the poem is that the THEE is unknown, manifold. But it is not unknown, and is single. It is obvious that Aiken is sucking his own thumb. The solution is that Aiken is his own THEE.

Baskin's drawing of the morning-glories is delightful, but his representations of the human form are ugly. Aiken's lines are not.

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THEATRE / Harold Clurman

Gore Vidal's *Weekend* (Broadhurst Theatre) has some amusing quips about LBJ and Nixon ("anti," of course), a funny scene in which a conservative Southern lady attempts integral cordiality with a Negro couple, the slight "twist" being that the Negro couple is in almost every respect reactionary. Still, it is a trivial play; its topicality no deeper than a barber shop sun tan.

The situation Mr. Vidal offers is that a liberal Republican Senator makes his bid for the Presidential nomination at the moment when his son returns from study abroad with a black fiancée. The play's "switch" is that the Senator insists his son marry the girl (she is pregnant) even though the boy is reluctant to do so and had never seriously intended marriage. But instead of ruining the Senator's political career, the contretemps appears virtually to assure his nomination, since the polls indicate public enthusiasm for his liberalism.

The play is such a drummed-up affair that the normally sensible Joseph Anthony's direction shows signs of desperation. Obvious points are made embarrassingly more so by a hammering so energetic that I imagined it could be heard inside Sardi's restaurant across the street.

Nice performances are nonetheless provided by most of the cast, notably on the distaff side: by Rosemary Murphy as the Senator's wife, by Kim Hunter as the Senator's mistress (Miss Hunter is even more attractive now than she was ten years ago), and by Eleanor Wilson who is most entertaining as the simple-minded lady from Dixie.

I have on several occasions noted my pleasure at the City Center Joffrey Ballet. There is of course a special delight in such purely choreographic numbers as (Vivaldi's) *Cello Concerto* or in the *Donizetti Variations*. There is also great theatrical excitement in *Astarte* with its erotic drama—superbly carried out by Trinette Singleton of a beauty both tantalizing and disturbing, and by the proud and powerful Maximiliano Zomosa—who move against a background of colored images slithering and melting in anticipatory or complementary replica of the stage movement. All of this is accompanied by the freest rock and roll sound at once cacophonous and exhilarating. The piece offers agony and release, the whole being a sort of extended epigram of tormented desire and ultimate liberation of the individual person amid the chaos of motorcars and the attendant machinery of the contemporary landscape.

The climax in this vein of theatrical symbolism is to be seen in a new number called *The Clowns*, with serial music rendered popular in the expert orchestration of Hershy Kay. Clive Barnes has interpreted this production as the struggle of those persons of good will in the holocausts of civilizations who arise from its debris, only to be destroyed again in an eternally recurrent cycle. It did not occur to me to interpret the piece at all—it may very well mean what Barnes says it does or something entirely different—but I was much taken with it as a visual stage phenomenon.

I enjoyed seeing these two ballets; they will bear repeated visits. I was also pleased by the few "boos" they provoked among those who resented the breach of ballet aesthetics, and the faint admixture of Music Hall sport in these numbers as well as in the humorous entertainment of the *Distractions*, choreographed by Lew Christensen to music by Joseph Haydn. Controversy and dissidence in the ballet world—regarded much too complacently by most of us—is a healthy sign.

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